God
823
Cro/Two
76711

00076711

BOMBAY BRANCH
OF THE
Royal Asiatic Society.

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018

TWO MASTERS

A Novel.

76711

BY

B. M. CROKER,

AUTHOR OF

PROPER PRIDE,' "PRETTY MISS NEVILLE,' "SOME ONE ELSE,' "A BIRD OF PASSAGE," "DIANA BARRINGTON,' ETC.

"I do perceive here a divided duty."

—*Othello.*

IN ONE VOLUME.

Rx - C 66.2

LONDON:
F. V. WHITE & CO.,
31, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND, W.C.
1890.

God
823
Cro/Two
76711.

PRINTED BY
KELLY AND CO., GATE STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS,
AND KINGSTON-ON-THAMES.

CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE.
I.	COUSIN MARY	1
II.	MORRIS SPEAKS PLAINLY, AND YET NOT PLAINLY ENOUGH	7
III.	I AM INVITED TO MAKE AN ORIGINAL REMARK	14
IV.	TOOSIE'S RELATIONS	18
V.	GLENMORE	24
VI.	MINE ENEMY	33
VII.	NO ENCORE!	41
VIII.	A GREAT SCARE	47
IX.	LAUNCHED AT LAST	52
X.	GRANDMAMMA SAYS "YES"	57
XI.	NO ALTERNATIVE	64
XII.	A WEDDING DRESS THAT COULD STAND ALONE	73
XIII.	MR. O'BRIEN IS WANTED	80
XIV.	BILLY PARK	89
XV.	MAD DOMINICK	96
XVI.	AUNT JULIA'S STORY	103
XVII.	DOMINICK KELLY'S SECRET	110
XVIII.	A BLIGHTED LIFE	117
XIX.	A GIRL'S FREAK	123

CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE.
XX.	PRIVATE ENQUIRIES	125
XXI.	SUCCESS, AND HOW I WON IT!	131
XXII.	OUR NEIGHBOURS	139
XXIII.	MRS. SHINE'S PREPARATIONS	147
XXIV.	SUGAR?	151
XXV.	ABOUT SPOONS, AND SPECTRES, AND STRAWBERRY JAM	161
XXVI.	MONA'S PROPHECY	168
XXVII.	CAPTAIN KARSLAKE LIVES AND LEARNS	175
XXVIII.	NEWS ON A WET DAY	186
XXIX.	MARRIED IN EARNEST	195
XXX.	THE FIRST CLOUD	201
XXXI.	THE SECOND MILESTONE ON THE HYTHE ROAD	205
XXXII.	A SENSITIVE, TENDER-HEARTED MAN	214
XXXIII.	SOMETHING QUEER ABOUT THE FAMILY	218
XXXIV.	BETWEEN TWO FIRES	227
XXXV.	A FORLORN HOPE	232
XXXVI.	JUDGMENT	239
XXXVII.	MY MOTHER-IN-LAW	244
XXXVIII.	A MEETING	252
XXXIX.	A STRAY PARAGRAPH	257
XL.	MRS. FLINT IN HER TRUE COLOURS	261
XLI.	TWO QUEENS IN BRENTFORD	268
XLII.	THE WORM TURNS	277
XLIII.	"ON URGENT PRIVATE AFFAIRS"	286
XLIV.	THE WORTH OF A BUTTON	295

TWO MASTERS.

POPULAR NEW NOVELS.

Now Ready, in One Vol., the Eighth Edition of

ARMY SOCIETY; or, Life in a Garrison Town. By JOHN STRANGE WINTER. Author of "Bootles' Baby." Cloth gilt, 6*s.*; also picture boards, 2*s.*

Also, now Ready, in Cloth Gilt, 2*s.* 6*d.* each.

GARRISON GOSSIP, Gathered in Blankhampton. By JOHN STRANGE WINTER. Also picture boards, 2*s.*
A SIEGE BABY. By the same AUTHOR. Also picture boards, 2*s.*
BEAUTIFUL JIM. By the same AUTHOR. Also picture boards, 2*s.*
MRS. BOB. By the same AUTHOR.
A LIFE INTEREST. By Mrs. ALEXANDER. Also picture boards, 2*s.*
KILLED IN THE OPEN. By Mrs. EDWARD KENNARD. Also picture boards, 2*s.*
THE GIRL IN THE BROWN HABIT. A Sporting Novel. By the same AUTHOR. Also picture boards, 2*s.*
A REAL GOOD THING. By the same AUTHOR. Also picture boards, 2*s.*
A CRACK COUNTY. By the same AUTHOR. Also picture boards, 2*s.*
LANDING A PRIZE. By the same AUTHOR.
STRAIGHT AS A DIE. By the same AUTHOR. Also picture boards, 2*s.*
TWILIGHT TALES. By the same AUTHOR. *Illustrated.*
MATRON OR MAID. By the same AUTHOR.
A DEVOUT LOVER. By Mrs. LOVETT-CAMERON. Also picture boards, 2*s.*
THE COST OF A LIE. By the same AUTHOR. Also picture boards, 2*s.*
THIS WICKED WORLD. By the same AUTHOR.
A LOST WIFE. By the same AUTHOR.
THE MASTER OF RATHKELLY. By HAWLEY SMART. Also picture boards, 2*s.*
LONG ODDS. By the same AUTHOR.
MISS MEPHISTOPHELES. By FERGUS HUME. Also picture boards, 2*s.*
SHE CAME BETWEEN. By Mrs. ALEXANDER FRASER.
DAUGHTERS OF BELGRAVIA. By the same AUTHOR.
THE CRUSADE OF THE "EXCELSIOR." By BRET HARTE. Also picture boards, 2*s.*
SHEBA. By "RITA."
MISS KATE. By the same AUTHOR.
DREAM FACES. By THE HONBLE. MRS. FETHERSTONHAUGH.
THE HONBLE. MRS. VEREKER. By the Author of "Molly Bawn," &c. Also picture boards, 2*s.*
A LIFE'S REMORSE. By the same AUTHOR.
THE DUCHESS OF ROSEMARY LANE. By B. L. FARJEON.
TOILERS OF BABYLON. By the same AUTHOR.
A YOUNG GIRL'S LIFE. By the same AUTHOR.
THE RIVAL PRINCESS. By JUSTIN M'CARTHY M.P., and Mrs. CAMPBELL PRAED.
THE LADIES' GALLERY. By the same AUTHORS.
VIOLET VYVIAN, M.F.H. By MAY CROMMELIN and J. MORAY BROWN.
A WOMAN'S FACE. By FLORENCE WARDEN. Author of "The House on the Marsh, 2*s.* (picture boards only).
SYBIL ROSS'S MARRIAGE. By F. C. PHILIPS & C. J. WILLS.
A DAUGHTER'S SACRIFICE. By F. C. PHILIPS & PERCY FENDALL.

F. V. WHITE & CO.,
31, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.

TWO MAIDENS.

CHAPTER I.

COUSIN MARY.

"Our talk
Was louder than beseemed, if we had known,
With argument and laughter."

—JEAN INGELOW.

"MISS LE MARCHANT, if you and Miss O'Brien do not stop talking this instant, I shall give you fifty lines to write out before tea." Thus spoke our by no means popular English governess, in her very shrillest key.

I am Miss Le Marchant, one of the culprits in question. I am, moreover, one of the "big" girls at Madame Prévost's select establishment for young gentlewomen, for I am nearly seventeen (with no claim, alas! to the usual pretty prefix! I have been called sincere, satirical, spirited and sharp, but my dearest bosom friend could not have it on her conscience saying that I was "sweet"). I become scarlet at the above-mentioned public rebuke, which caused the seniors to stare and the juniors to giggle, and I laugh in a scornful and conspicuous manner, and cast a glance of defiance right into Miss Finn's angry little green eyes, a glance which costs me fifty lines, and a very inky pair of fingers, but nothing is to be had for nothing in this world. Mary O'Brien, my cousin, had talked twice as much as I had done (her invariable habit), nevertheless, as I bent over my detestable task, with a weary head and aching back, *she* lolled at her ease in Madame's own sacred chair, and devoured, simultaneously, a stick of chocolate and a thrilling story. This was the hour of recreation, and

everyone was at liberty until the first dressing-bell rang before our ceremonious, but somewhat scanty tea. It was a lovely afternoon in June, and all my school-fellows were strolling about the grounds in twos and threes, or standing here and there, in noisy groups, discussing the approaching breaking-up dance, the increasing infirmity of Madame's temper, their new dresses, the quality of the coffee at breakfast, and who was to have the different prizes and who was not. Strange to relate, their surmises in this latter direction were generally far astray.

I nibbled the end of my penholder, and stared out regretfully through the green window; of course, I had only myself to thank for my enforced seclusion. Many a time and oft had I to reap the unpleasant consequences of some rash word or look; for I was hot-tempered, impulsive, and reckless, being half Irish. Half Irish I am, but I have never as yet set foot on that gem of the Western Ocean, nor do I converse with the faintest suspicion of a brogue, in which I differ from my cousin Mary, who was, so to speak, caught wild, and sent over to be tamed and humanised by Madame Prévost three terms previously. Mary has undoubtedly acquired a polish, such as it is! She no longer descends the stairs, sliding merrily down with both hands on the banisters, nor does she burst into a room as if chased by a mad bull, neither does she now whistle popular tunes, or say "Sure I will," or "It's illigant," but her brogue is as melodious, her 'R's as rolling, and her hair is nearly as wild as ever. She talks incessantly; hers is the last tongue silent at night, and the first to bestir itself in the morning. She tells us impressive histories of "our place at home," our carriages and horses, our ten servants, our society, our family, our ancestors, yea, and even our *Banshee!* She talks with such steady volubility on these subjects (and we all listen, slightly awed, I less than the others, conscious of a certain proud participation in the whole connection, Banshee included) that to an outsider at a little distance, it sounds exactly as if she were reading aloud.

Mary has a father and mother, two brothers and two sisters, whom I have never seen. Neither of her sisters

would consent to being "finished" in England, and Mary often hinted at the sensation that her new manners, accent (?) and accomplishments would excite, not merely in the bosom of her own family, but the whole neighbourhood, when she finally returned home for what is called "good," but occasionally might as well be called "bad."

However, I am wandering a long way from myself and my fifty lines, and before proceeding further it may be as well to mention that my name is Eleanor, generally "Nellie," Le Marchant. "I am an orphan, I spend all my holidays with my grandmamma in London. She lives there nearly the whole year round, and her house in Green Street, Park Lane, is the only home that I can remember, and it has merely received me during my brief vacations.

"There! thank goodness, that is done at last!" I exclaimed, shutting the book with a loud bang, and turning round on the edge of the form. "It's shameful that we elder girls are kept in the same order as if we were in the little schoolroom, and never allowed to open our lips."

"Yes, one quite forgets the sound of one's own voice," returned Mary, closing her novelette. "I am happy to say that in another fortnight Madame will have seen the last of *me*. I go home, and I not only go home—but I come out."

"And quite time you did," I replied frankly; "you are eighteen, and you *look* fully two and twenty."

"Nonsense," rather angrily. "You say that just out of mere spite and envy, because old Granny Le Marchant intends to keep you here for another year. You know you would give your ears if your cage door was going to be opened too. Oh," clasping her hands with sudden ecstasy, "won't I have fun, and won't I cut out Mona and Posie. No, I am not so sure of Mona. She is pretty, but then she has no accomplishments like you and me!"

I was not at all flattered at being thus taken into partnership, but I restrained my feelings with an effort, as Mary glibly enumerated her gifts. "I can paint landscapes—all but skies and trees. I can sing songs,

and play four pieces without a mistake. I can do my hair in the latest fashion, and I can dance the new waltz. I won't teach Mona and Posie, no, not if they go on their bended knees to me. I shall come out at Lord Dundalk's ball, he gives one every year in the shooting season, and I know I shall have *crowds* of partners," she concluded, complacently. I was by no means so sanguine on this score. Mary was far from being a beauty in my eyes. She was short and stout, much too stout; she had a figure like a cottage loaf; her face was tolerable, but she had very light eyebrows and lashes, which, although a capital match for her lint-white locks, gave her an indefinite and unfinished appearance. She modestly assured me that she was by far the best-looking of the three sisters, and declared her relatives, Mona and Posie, to be both stay-at-homes and dowdy. She showed me their long letters, in which they descanted on bad times and an uncomfortable domestic budget (letters which largely discounted Mary's proud boastings). She had a loud laugh and boisterous ways, and only that she was my own first cousin, and that of course such a thing was impossible, I might have been inclined to think her a little vulgar. Mary insisted on our relationship, and on "cousins being cousins" to an extent that alarmed and astonished me; but then I had never encountered a cousin before. She borrowed my books, pocket-mon " handkerchiefs and linen, and any of my garments th would fit her, not once, not a mere "lend of a loan," b constantly and steadily, until she wore them out, precisely as James of Scotland wore out the Earl of Mar's silk stockings. Why then, will say the astute reader, did you not likewise prey upon her wardrobe, and give her a Roland for an Oliver? For the excellent reason that there was nothing to prey on, nothing in which I could, or would, be seen. Her dresses were the terrible triumphs of some roadside Irish dressmaker, not even a villager; her hats and bonnets were the scorn of the whole establishment; her boots and gloves too were utterly awful, but little she recked of these deficiencies. She wore my dresses, my hats, and my jackets; luckily for me, my shoes and gloves would not fit her—a frequent subject of her loudest lamentations. We shared the

same room—being cousins. Madame thought she was doing a wonderful kindness to the shy, inexperienced, wild Irish girl in quartering her on one of her oldest pupils, and the wild Irish girl soon made herself completely at home with me and my belongings; there was an ease and "matter of course air" about her whole proceedings that took me so utterly aback at first that I was unable to speak or remonstrate. Afterwards it was too late, and Mary continually reminded me "that we were nearly the same as sisters," and that "blood was thicker than water," and that I was more than welcome to the loan of any of her possessions, and, finally, that she did not know another soul on earth whose gowns she would have liked to wear but mine, not even Mona's or Posie's, which, if they emanated from the same *artiste* as her own, I could readily believe.

However, in those days I was not nearly as sharp, nor as far-seeing and suspicious as I am now, and I was really attached to Mary in my own fashion; I looked up to her (for hers was the master mind) and I believed in her implicitly, although I was two classes above her in school, and a proficient in music and painting, in short, one of Madame's "show girls," whilst Mary came to me for help in sums, in composition, in translation, and looked upon my assistance as her positive *right*.

No doubt she worked hard, and made the most of her time, but one year is too short a period in which to acquire anything more than a thin veneer of accomplishments. Mary's English History was disgraceful. I heard her state, with some complacency, that Mary Queen of Scots was one of the wives of Henry VIII., and that America had been discovered by Robinson Crusoe—but *this* is strictly private.

"I suppose you will come out next season," she said, after an unusually long silence, gazing at me meditatively with her chin in her hand. "You will be presented at Court, and all that; I know your grannie intends you to marry some great swell, mother said so, and to make what is called 'a splendid match;' but all the same, I do not exactly see how you are going to do it?" She paused as if expecting me to contradict her, and then went on in a tone of dispassionate criticism. "You

have no money and you have no looks worth mentioning. Your nose is too short, your face is too thin, you have no colour and as for your eyes——"

"Well," angrily, "and what about my eyes?"

"They are not bad when one can see them," she pursued, with exasperating solemnity, "but they are generally half-shut; you are always smiling and screwing them up, and let me tell you it is not at all becoming, and I don't believe it can be lucky to be always laughing as you are."

"I am not always laughing; what is there to laugh at in this place?" I demanded fiercely, still smarting with the memory of my fifty lines.

"I'm sure I don't know, but you find plenty to amuse you," she replied, with a shrug (a miserable imitation of Mademoiselle's). "How I wish your grannie would ask me on a visit, and give me some nice dresses like yours, and allow her maid to do my hair, and take me to balls and all that——".

"She never goes to balls," I interrupted triumphantly; "and Morris never dresses me, or does my hair! She walks out with me in the Park, that's all."

"And don't you go with Mrs. Le Marchant in the carriage?" she inquired rather blankly.

"Never, excepting to church and the dentist's."

"That's bad, very bad. Then it's not precisely a bed of roses, my sweet Nellie; it must be unspeakably dull walking out with Morris? If I had your chances I would insist on your grannie trotting me about; I'd stick to her apron like a burr. What a pity it is that she hates all the O'Briens, root and branch, and never will hear of your having me, even for one day, as I pass through town. If she would, you should see how I would wind myself into her aged affections! She need not be afraid of *me*. I know everything!"

"Everything! What do you mean?"

Mary looked at me steadily, with her little light eyes, and nodded her head with a serious air, that implied a formidable ability to say something out of the common.

"Mary," I repeated, shaking her by the arm and speaking with unusual excitement, "what is the secret, what do you mean, when you say you know everything?"

"Everything about her wig and teeth, of course," she returned with a queer nervous little laugh, a laugh that with her, was a sure sign of mental perturbation. Could she be deceiving me? Impossible. What secret could *she* have in common with grandmamma?

"Bless me, there's the dressing bell!" she exclaimed, starting to her feet as she spoke.

"There will be a grand tea to-night. *Edith Jones* had a hamper from home: cakes, jam, and clotted cream," and she smacked her lips. "I intend to be very civil to Edith this evening," she continued, with a giggle, "in spite of the awful row we had yesterday about the ink on her German dictionary. Come along, the anticipation of the feast has made me as hungry as a hunter." (This was no new condition), and so saying, my eager cousin fled up two stairs at a time, to our mutual bower, and proceeded to invest herself rapidly in a cream-coloured costume, once my property, whose glory had, alas! thanks to her steady patronage, long since departed.

CHAPTER II.

MORRIS SPEAKS PLAINLY AND YET NOT PLAINLY ENOUGH.

"Mark now, a plain tale shall put you down."

THE holidays are over and between ourselves I do not regret them much. Six weeks of the London season in a bijou mansion in Green Street, Park Lane, sounds uncommonly well; but unluckily for me I was not "out." I was not yet seventeen and grandmamma (who was no the traditional fond old lady of story books, but a fashionable, and well-preserved elderly matron) had no relish for hobbledehoy, half-grown up girls, and kept me sternly in the background with an iron hand. She had never approved of her only son's marriage with a pretty, penniless Irish girl, whose early death had transferred me to her own reluctant keeping; she could not well refuse me a home, but she took care that I saw it but seldom, and troubled her as little as possible. Grandmamma had no love for me, nor indeed for any one; if

she had affections, they were bestowed on her peevish white poodle and in a fainter degree on Morris, her maid. It was not in her nature to love any one. Her heart was like a hard kernel; it had no feeling. No great emotions of joy or grief had ever stirred her. She was constitutionally phlegmatic and as a consequence had "worn" well. Time had no auxiliary to trace those deep furrows on her face, such as are visible on the brows and cheeks of most old ladies of her years. She was nearly seventy (according to the O'Briens), but really in a becoming cap or bonnet, and with the light well behind her, she did not look more than fifty, and a well-preserved fifty to boot. She wore her hair, which was very fine and snow white, in curls one over the other, in a kind of fringe, and exceedingly well these white locks contrasted with her quick and still most brilliant black eyes; her teeth were perfect (the very best a dentist could furnish); and her slight, upright figure, splendid toilettes, and witty tongue, made Mrs. Le Marchant a popular feature at many a dinner and in many a drawing-room. She combined the social tastes of twenty-five, with the wrinkles of seventy, and gave charming little feasts, crowded at homes, and delectable luncheons. I need scarcely say, that I never figured at any of these entertainments; indeed, I believe that my existence was unknown to most of grannie's gay friends. I occupied a kind of front attic, a very bald, bare-looking room, with shabby slips of carpet on the boards, and all the invalid furniture from the other bed-rooms. I vibrated between this apartment and a small one at the back of the dining-room, where Morris refurbished her mistress's dresses, and washed "Muff," the poodle, and I took my meals. Grannie never rose before eleven or twelve, lunched in her dressing-room, and then went out, returning to afternoon tea, or to receive friends, and generally going forth again to dine or to a theatre; so I saw but little of her: sometimes for days we never met, or I would have a mere vision of a magnificent figure, in velvet and diamonds, stepping down stairs to her brougham, *en route* to some fashionable entertainment.

Morris was my more immediate patroness, "a very

superior person" in grandmamma's opinion, with a thin figure, thin face, thin hair, and a red nose. Sometimes, by way of a treat for me, she and I sallied forth to shop for grannie in Sloane Street, or made expeditions across the Park to the General Provider, or jogged down Piccadilly in a carriage-and-pair, to wit, a blue "Favorite" bus, and visited picture galleries, or occupied cheap seats at morning concerts; we also prowled about the Exhibition of the year on shilling days, and did Madame Tussaud's and the Tower, for by no means the first time. All this may seem a mad whirl of dissipation to a country girl; but I was not a country girl; I was a Cockney in all but name. Shop windows of the most ravishing description palled on my jaded eyes; I would far rather have studied the human face divine. I had no London friends of my own age, and I looked on enviously at the animated greetings between groups of pretty, smartly-dressed girls, as they chose their gloves and veils in fashionable emporiums along Knightsbridge. As Morris sat working and I sat reading in the morning room—so called, but to me it was afternoon room and evening room as well—she often gave me a bird's-eye view of things in general, and her own candid opinion of me and my prospects in particular. As, for instance, one night as she sat stitching, and I, tired of reading, rose up and stood before the mirror over the chimney-piece, putting back my tumbled hair, I noticed her watching me narrowly with her head on one side. I saw her in the mirror. Presently she exclaimed: "Dear me, Miss Nellie, how tall you do grow, like a beanstalk. Your figure ain't bad, indeed it's better than I expected; but your face——" she had a trick of stopping short at most interesting moments, and she paused expressively, leaving me to finish the sentence from my own imagination.

"Well," turning round sharply, "and pray what is the matter with my face?"

"Oh, nothing particular, that's just it! That's what your grandmamma keeps saying, 'It's just like the face of ten hundred other girls.' Nothing to create a remark one way or another."

"And is not that just what it ought to be?

"No," she answered, with a profound nod. "You see, Miss Nellie, when you were a little girl you gave hopes of growing up rare and pretty; that's one reason your grandmamma had you here, and she was full sure she would marry you off in your first season to a Lord, at the very least, and—now—now——"

"Well, and now?" I continued briskly.

"Why, you are a great disappointment, in looks I mean. Your nose is not what it promised to be, and you have nothing but your eyes and hair, and that's no use, I mean the hair. You have so much that everyone thinks it's false, and it might just as well be too."

"And my teeth also, I suppose," I added, displaying two rows of ivory for my own satisfaction, and turning them with a hideous grin on Morris. "And so grandmamma is greatly disappointed that I am not a beauty; is that what you mean?"

"Aye, that she is," shaking her head despondently.

"And every holiday, instead of getting better I get worse! Never mind, Morris," I added consolingly. "Perhaps I have only got an ugly fit on. I may grow out of it; who knows, if I wore a fringe, and had my gowns from Madame Elise, or Kate Riley, if I might not surprise you yet?"

To this suggestion Morris only shook her head sadly; evidently in her opinion, my case was hopeless!

Fortunately I had no high respect for my own charms, I was never considered one of the "pretty girls" at school, and school is a place (at least mine was) where everyone found their true level, and was made accustomed to the plainest speaking.

I was voted clever—thanks to which character I was always called upon to lend a helping hand with sums and essays; but my claims to beauty had never been so much as mentioned. All the same I was not at all pleased to hear Morris thus discoursing so discouragingly on the subject of my appearance.

I elongated my neck, and turned my head from side to side so as to try and catch my profile to the best advantage, and then I spoke, still critically contemplating my own reflection.

"Candidly speaking, Morris, I know I am not much

to look at, although my hair and teeth are as good as if they were *false,* too good to be true you say; but if my complexion improves, and my face fills out, I should not be surprised if I turned out quite a beauty in the coming by-and-bye."

"Fie, Miss Nellie," she ejaculated, with a smile of toleration, "how you do talk—you are a funny young lady, and always full of your jokes."

"But *this* is no joke," I returned, now facing her with my hands behind me. "Do you imagine for one instant that I would *joke* on such a serious matter as my personal appearance! No, no! And supposing I became a splendid swan instead of an ugly duckling —of course you have read the story Morris—what will grannie do then. Eh? Tell me that, if you please?"

"Oh! she will marry you off next season—you could not be in better hands."

"But supposing I refuse to marry, and I won't, won't! won't—what then?"

"Oh! Miss Nellie, you know that's nonsense; you must, you ain't got no choice. Your grandmamma has given you the best education, even to the banjo, and will get all your dresses from her own dressmaker, and give you every advantage; but she don't reckon on keeping you. She don't like young people about her as you know, and she said to me only last week, 'This is terrible about Miss Le Marchant; I shall keep her at school another year.'"

"Another year," I shrieked. "What do you mean, Morris? I'm to leave at Christmas, my book-box and easel are already promised, and my bedroom and my corner in our pew are bespoke. Of course I leave at Christmas."

"No, not now, Miss. She wants to see how you will look in another year's time, and give you every chance, and then she will bring you out and give you a season here, and if nothing comes of *that*——" pausing as usual.

"Yes, if nothing comes of that!" I added sharply.

"Why, she can't do no more, Miss, and you'll not mention this, but she says she will send you off to your

mother's people, and see what hand *they* can make of you. She will pay them of course. You know she could never abide a young person living with her permanent. You know it, Miss Nellie, as well as I do; so just you make hay whilst the sun shines." She concluded in a tone of solemn warning, slipping off a thread as she spoke.

"I wish you would tell me one thing, Morris," I said sitting down at the table and leaning my chin on my hands, "just one thing more. Why is grandmamma so queer?"

"Queer, whatever do you mean, Miss?"

"She never speaks of father, who was her only son. She never mentions mother, except to say something cutting about scheming families, and foolish marriages. What does it all mean? You might tell me. You see I don't remember either father or mother. How could I remember her; she died when I was born. Grandmamma never speaks of father; no, no one does. Did, did," lowering my voice, "he *do* anything?" I added mysteriously.

"Great patience! Miss Nellie," cried Morris, with a violent start and jerk of her elbow, that nearly capsized her workbasket, "whatever in the world put such strange notions into your head this night? You are a rare, extraordinary young lady; first saying you'll grow up a beauty, and then talking such folly: it's well your grandmamma does not hear you! And now it's time for your supper, and I'll ring for the tray. You know it's in bed at half-past nine you ought to be, and there's the church clock striking ten. Nothing like early hours for the complexion," and she pulled the bell violently and then quitted the room. Presently my frugal supper of bread and cheese and a glass of milk made its appearance, and I rapidly despatched it, and went away to my bower under the slates with the unquestioning obedience of a child of seven. As I lay awake, pondering over many things, and listening to the roll of carriages up and down Park Lane, it suddenly was borne in on my mind, in one stinging, sharp recollection, that now I came to think over it, away from Morris's voluble tongue, she had never answered my questions about my father, and she

had become as red as her nose, from chin to brow. What did it mean ?

I had been told that he died suddenly on a passage to Australia, where he went for the benefit of his health ; but nothing farther had been divulged. I dared not open the subject to grandmamma; honestly I was a good deal afraid of grannie ; and it was certainly odd that there was not one single likeness of her only child, her dead son, among all the countless pictures and photographs that adorned her charming boudoir and drawing-room.

There was some mystery about him, of that I was certain, and I was quite old enough to raise the veil, and know what strange story was connected with my father's past. Know it I would, I was fully resolved upon this, as I sat up in bed and made a kind of mental vow, that all my energies (a considerable force) should be expended in unravelling the reason of granny's icy silence on the subject of her only son.

I could not sleep, I, whose capacity for long and uninterrupted slumber, had more than once aroused grandmamma's envy and ire. I lay awake hour after hour in a strange and excited frame of mind. I seemed to have suddenly aroused some dormant idea that refused to be laid—to be standing on the threshold of a new phase of existence ; to be passing from the school girl, with her mind full of to-morrow's lessons (of a difficult German translation, a tough question in fractions, a dry subject whereon to write, an interesting composition for our literary master), these things had occasionally kept me from sleeping, nothing else.

Now it was different : a burning, penetrating idea was throbbing in my brain. I was no longer a school girl, only anxious to maintain my reputation as one of Madame's cleverest pupils. No, no, nothing of the kind, that was all past and gone. I was a young woman, with a purpose !

CHAPTER III.

I AM INVITED TO MAKE AN ORIGINAL REMARK.

"I do but sing because I must."
—PRINCESS.

WITH the purpose alluded to at the end of the last chapter still uppermost in my mind, I rose the next morning fully resolved to leave no stone unturned to solve the mystery. I threw out many hints and feelers to Morris during our constitutional, and, turn the conversation as she would, I always led it straight back to the history of my parents. But Morris was far too clever to allow any school girl of seventeen thus to pump her. She doubled and twisted and dodged and contrived to avoid answering leading questions in a manner that reflected the greatest credit on her mental faculties. I left off no wiser than I began. My "Pa" and "Ma," as she called them, were dead years upon years: why had I suddenly taken it into my head to "worrit about them?" Thus she unkindly termed my newly-born filial interest. "Best let them alone."

This advice was not acceptable, and if there is one virtue to which I may honestly lay claim, I believe it to be perseverance. As I had failed with Morris I made up my mind (Oh! bold resolve!) to try grandmamma. I was returning to school in two day's time, and there was not a moment to be lost. I had so few opportunities, too, of a *tête-à-tête* and when I was favoured with one, I was generally too much awed to speak. But for once I was determined (if I got the chance) to bring my courage to the sticking point—and fate was kind.

I was desired to join her at afternoon tea, and to induct myself into my Sunday gown, which I did with the greatest alacrity, and lost no time in presenting myself in the front drawing-room, a delightful apartment in my eyes, with rose-tinted half-closed blinds, banks of

hothouse flowers on the window sills and in the fireplace, inviting plush and velvet chairs, soft Persian rugs, Indian draperies, silver ornaments, priceless old china and numbers of quaint little tables and cabinets, scattered over with photos of grannie's friends. In the midst of this dream of a room (which followed the latest craze in flowers and knick-knacks), my grandmamma was seated in a low chair near the tea table, toying with a French novel and a silver paper knife, and posed most becomingly with respect to the light. She was attired in a black satin tea gown, draped with quantities of old Spanish lace, a little French cap lay on the top of her white curls, and there were diamonds in her ears, and big diamonds on her hands. Her hands alone betrayed her real age. They were a good deal wrinkled, and the blue veins had a swollen look; but with her hands concealed, grannie might easily pass for a handsome and well-preserved middle aged lady, whereas she was in truth an old woman! I admired her most respectfully, but evidently the admiration was not mutual, as she steadily stared at me through her long-handled gold eyeglass in grim observant silence, whilst I bashfully advanced. She put it down with one hand and offered me the other, and sighed an exceedingly deep and bitter sigh, a sigh presumably caused by my shortcomings in looks.

"Dear me, Ellen, where did you learn such a way of prancing into a room? Can't you walk, walk like a lady?" she asked, in an irritated tone.

I coloured deeply. I did not like this style of conversation. I had been told at school that I walked well and had readily believed my kind informant. I took a seat hastily and cast down my eyes, and said nothing, whilst grandmamma looked me over carefully to see if there was anything else about me to call for criticism. Of course there was—my hair—my unlucky hair!

"How frightfully you do your hair, child! It is like a great hemp rope, and such an ugly colour, too, neither fair or brown; the less seen of it the better. Can't you make your head look smaller?"

"I'll try, grandmamma," I answered meekly. I felt very small indeed all over.

"I do wish you had some looks," pouring out the tea as she spoke, in an angry jerky way, and dashing the cream and sugar in. "It's so very provoking for a girl to be so undeniably plain" (querulously)! "Your mother was a beauty, not that I admired her—and look at *me*."

I did—she was an exceedingly handsome, well-preserved old dame; her eyes were bright, her nose was perfect, her hair was decided in its tint, not like mine, that seemed unable to make up its mind whether to be light or dark.

"You go back to school on Wednesday, Morris tells me?"

"Yes, Grandmamma."

"You are to stay till next Easter. I am resolved on that; it would be preposterous to remove you sooner."

"Yes, grandmamma," I acquiesced faintly.

"'Yes, grandmamma,' she mimicked. "Can't you think of something else to say, you truly bread and butter Miss, but 'Yes, grandmamma.' Now *do* let me hear you originate *one* remark, one original remark, to show that your fourteen years of most expensive schooling have not been utterly thrown away. Come now, say something," she urged in a mocking tone, "do say something I have not heard before."

Yes, I *would*. Here was an opening, here was my opportunity—my courage permitting—my heart beat fearfully fast, my cheeks felt as if they were in flame. I had the greatest difficulty in finding my voice, but I did speak, I did utter an original remark. It was this:

"Grandmamma, I should like to know if you have any picture of my father?"

Grandmamma paused with her cup half way to her lips, set it down with a rattle in the saucer, and turned a livid face to me, as she said with a tremor in her voice, and a fire in her eye, "Why?"

"Because I should like to see it. I want to know what he was like, and to hear, if I may, something about him," I stammered out.

"There is no picture of your father," she answered sharply. "I am glad of it! Never name him to me, girl! He is your disgrace and mine too."

"And why? What did he do?" I enquired with extraordinary courage.

"Never ask! It is your unspeakable happiness not to know what I know. Never seek to discover this as long as you live; indeed, seek or not, it is out of your power. But one word more, as long as you exist on my charity, do not dare to open this subject again. You will have serious reason to regret it, if you *do*."

Her manner was so stern, so hard, so cruel, her words so biting, her look so hostile that I felt chilled all over, warm August afternoon though it was. I became pale, my lips quivered, but brought forth no sound; my eyes filled with tears. At this awkward juncture the door opened, and a visitor entered, a man, an old man in my eyes then, possibly he was five and forty. I was not allowed to meet visitors; but there was no time to hustle me away, so grandmamma made the best of circumstances. She changed her countenance simultaneously with the opening of the door, and was instantly all smiles, surprise and false teeth. At this moment I almost *hated* grandmamma. She did not introduce me, in spite of the new arrival's hard staring and futile endeavours to include me in the conversation. He was going to Switzerland in a few days, so was grandmamma, but what was Switzerland to me?

"I have a note to show you," said grandmamma, confidentially. "I'll send for it," beckoning to me to approach. "Ellen, tell Morris to bring down my letter case; and," she added in a much lower key, "you need not come back."

I was not sorry for the permission to retire, indeed I had been nervously badgering my brains for some plausible means of effecting my exit, which I now did, and not in a creditable manner.

What would Madame have said had she seen me backing into a small table, knocking over two photo frames, and bestowing a kind of lop-sided bow on grannie's visitor, as I thankfully withdrew.

CHAPTER IV.

TOOSIE'S RELATIVES.

I DID not shed any tears as I stepped into a cab on Wednesday morning *en route* to Waterloo station, and school my destination. I was rather glad to return to Madame Prévost's and the companionship of my old friends, and plenty of hard work soon dispelled the strange ideas I had been brooding over in the holidays. I really had very little time for meditation, or puzzling my brains over what my father could have done to disgrace not merely himself, but grandmamma and me. "No doubt I shall find out some day and before long," I said to myself, and with this salve, I quieted my uneasy thoughts for the present, telling myself that I could do no good to anyone by neglecting my studies, and giving way to dreamy speculations. Time enough for that, when I had left school, whereby you may perceive that I was rather a practical young person.

Time rolled on as slowly as it always does when one is very young. Christmas came round at last. At Christmas grandmamma had usually numbers of invitations to country houses, and she did not like to be afflicted with an encumbrance who would require a certain amount of new dresses and big boxes, and with whom (worse than all) she would have to share her maid! And from a fleeting glance she had of me (when I was suffering from a fearful cold in my head), her hopes of my being a credit to her in the way of looks sunk figuratively below zero, consequently she was only too happy to snatch at any invitation that would take me out of her sight. One of my school fellows had asked me up to Scotland. Grandmamma never hesitated an instant, made no prudent enquiries, but figuratively jumped at the offer in a polite and scented note.

Theodosia Maxwell, known to her intimates as

"Toosie," was a Glasgow girl, born in a flat in that city before her father had made his fortune; she was short and slight, with wonderful yellow hair, and full of unflagging energy and feverishly high spirits. I did not then know that these "spirits" in her had taken the form of excessive fastness in her sisters, or that they were known far and wide as "capital fun" by men, and "those awful women" by the ladies. But I *did* know that Mr. Maxwell was a very wealthy man, who had made his way up the ladder by sheer hard work, capability, determination, honesty and luck—Yes, there is such a thing as luck—he was a widower, with three daughters, and one son in the army, and as I had a good stock of high spirits of my own (when not under grandmamma's eye) I looked forward to my trip across the border with the keenest anticipation. How heavily the train was laden and how cold it was on the journey! Loudly did Toosie demand fresh foot warmers at every station; as we neared our destination the cold became more intense, and I certainly looked my worst, which was saying a good deal, as I stepped out on the platform at St. Enoch's with feet and hands like ice, and a nose the colour of pickled cabbage. Toosie was but little better, although a native and inured to the climate. Another short journey by rail and we were at our destination. A neat brougham awaited us at the station, and after a considerable drive between bare hedges and along frosty roads, we turned into an avenue lined with fine old timber, approaching a noble old place that stood under the shelter of a range of low hills stretching away into fells and moors, as far as the eye could see.

"Well, what do you think of Glenmore?" enquired Toosie, "Glenmore Castle, though there are no towers."

"It looks like a place one would read of in Sir Walter Scott's novels; it's a delightful old house."

"Yes, it's old enough; it required a great deal of doing up. Many of the rooms were panelled in oak when we came, but Papa has had most of them painted green or coral pink, and now they look quite different. The drawing-room is magnificent. It is very lofty and has great pillars in it; it is upholstered in Tartan satin,

curtains and all; it is so cheerful and so national papa says, and here we are," she concluded, wrenching open the door of the brougham and springing out.

"Well Mac Tavish," to a smart footman on the steps, "where are the young ladies? I hope tea is ready. We are just perished with the cold. Come along Nellie, they are sure to be in here." Crossing a great, cold hall, Toosie pushed the door open, and we found ourselves in the presence of her two sisters and her aunt (their chaperone). They all three instantly rushed at us, with various loud exclamations, and a sound of kissing might be heard lasting for fully two minutes. And then they all three kissed me, just as long and as heartily as Toosie herself, and finally we were introduced.

"This is Jessie," said my school-fellow, pointing to her eldest sister; "this is Tommy, short for Tomasina," nodding at the other, "and that's Aunt Flora; but we never dream of calling her aunt, only Flora, or Flo, and you are to do the same."

At this the lady indicated gave a loud harsh laugh, like a cockatoo, imitating her betters, and said, "To be sure she shall. I am game for any number of adopted nieces or nephews!" And then we all sat down, and every one, myself excepted, began to talk at once, but I took off my hat and listened and looked, a somewhat unusual *rôle* for me.

The two Miss Maxwells were tall and slight, and sandy. They had perfect tailor-made figures, and wore neat tailor-made dresses, with stuck-up collars, white ties, and gold pins and waistcoats. They appeared to be between the ages of twenty and twenty-five. Aunt Flora was a very small woman, with a trim little figure, beautifully dressed in a dark red costume. She wore no fringe and no masculine collar or waistcoat, but there the difference between her and her nieces ended; in her manners she appeared to be as young as any of them; and to my great astonishment her sentences were well spiced with slang.

"We did not expect to see you so soon," she said, "or we would have been looking out. The truth is, we have been so busy talking over a bit of fun we are going to have, that we half forgot the time."

"And what is the fun to be?" enquired Toosie. "I hope Nellie and I can share it. Goodness knows we want something to amuse us just home from school, far more than you do, so let us hear it at once."

"You are not out, you two," returned Tommy tartly. "You cannot go to balls and you need not expect it."

"Oh, balls are not everything," rejoined her sister, "and I shall make the Pater give a dance at home. Now what's your fun?"

"It's not exactly fun, but Colin is bringing two brother officers from Maryhill down to stay, bachelors of course. They arrive to-night, and we are going to take them to the county ball on Thursday."

"Oh," cried Toosie indignantly, "and is that all? I thought you were going to get up theatricals, and a Christmas tree and a servants' dance, at the very least. Men in a house are a dreadful infliction, especially strangers."

"These strangers will not interfere with you at all," retorted Jessie. "Colin says they are quite the pick of the Regiment, and one of them is a vision of beauty—a kind of look-and-die hero."

"But rather a bear in manners," put in Aunt Flo, with a "ha, ha," all her own.

"Oh is he?" returned Tommy; "you will see how I shall tame him. I'll be bear leader; recollect girls," looking round as she spoke, "that I bespeak the bear for myself."

"I am sure you are welcome to him, as far as I am concerned," said Aunt Flo, generously. "I never admire dark men," by which little speech I learned that she evidently went shares in her nieces' admirers, and did not at all consider herself what is commonly called "on the shelf."

"We had the greatest difficulty to persuade the Pater to ask them," continued Jessie. "He does not object to dozens of men in and out all day, but he hates men staying in the house. They don't study his little ways. They sit up half the night smoking, and they won't come down to prayers in the morning, and, worse still, they interrupt all his best stories, or yawn in his face, so he says, poor dear man!"

"The bear will be sure to yawn and growl and go to sleep. Why did Colin ask him?" said Toosie irritably.

"Oh! because he is such a good shot and a good fellow, and he was keen on coming, and Colin likes him."

"Keen on coming! Then he must have heard of me," said Tommy, with a giggle of complacency.

"What do you say, girls? And I have another piece of news for you, Toosie: Pollockburn house is let for the shooting—has been full all the season. An Englishman has taken it, a Mr. Norton, with a wife and daughter: the daughter is pretty, but rather stuckuppish, but the old people are very friendly, and have foregathered with us, ever since our first call. We are going over there to a dance to-morrow; and now enough. You two are starving; come into the breakfast room, I ordered tea there. You can sit comfortably down to hot buttered scones and make a good meal, and after that we must all go up and adorn ourselves for Colin and company," so said Tommy at the top of her voice. Every one here spoke at the top of their voices, perhaps because the rooms were so large, as she led the way across the hall. "They will be here before we know where we are, and I am just dying to see the bear—my bear if you please."

"No one is anxious to dispute him with you; no one wants a brute," said Jessie, delighted with her own wit; "I am going to fascinate the other."

"And pray what is to become of *me?*" enquired Aunt Flora in a tone of affected anguish.

"Oh! you Flo, you know you always cut us out; no one has any sympathy for you, you shocking little flirt."

I was struck dumb, not to say half-choked with a piece of buttered scone, to hear a niece address an elder, and an aunt, in this fashion! What would have been my fate had I dared to hint half as much to grandmamma? And yet there was no doubt that she much preferred the society of men to that of her own sex; and if there was one thing she abhorred and shrank from, it was the company of other old ladies, above all her contemporaries.

Glenmore had money inscribed all over it in large

legible characters; the foot sank in soft carpets; full length mirrors met one at every turn. My room was the most luxurious I had ever occupied—not that *this* is paying it any compliment. It contained a duchesse dressing table, cheval glass, writing table, couches, arm chairs and quantities of pictures and pretty things, all set off by crimson and grey hangings, and the furniture covered to correspond. My apartment opened into Toosie's, so that I had no need of a night-light for fear of robbers or ghosts; and she kept the door wide open and harangued me at intervals, during her toilet and mine.

"Wear your white surah that you got for the breaking up last summer, and I'll wear mine," she said. "You shall pass as my sister, and really, Nellie," now standing in the threshold, brush in hand, "you see that up here among us you are quite good-looking. I noticed you at tea to-night, and upon my word Jessie and Tommy are nowhere beside you; and when you have a colour, such as you have now—only I know you won't *keep* it, or it will settle in your nose and ears—you look quite pretty, that is for Glenmore. Of course down at Richmond no one thought anything of you, and I was beneath contempt. There, there is the first gong. Come in and lace me, for I sent Cameron away." I responded to this invitation at once, for I was ready, and as I laced Toosie she gave me a kind of key to her family, which I subsequently found very useful. The Pater was a very dear old person and let them do just whatever they pleased, provided they were down in time for prayers and porridge, and went twice to the U. P. (United Presbyterian) on Sunday.

Jessie and Tommy were not pretty—I could see that myself—but they had each a good fortune, and were splendid housekeepers, and the best dancers within four counties, and very popular girls. Colin was awfully extravagant and conceited, and tried to lord it over every one. He had a horrid temper too, and was not a bit like the rest of the family. Jessie was led entirely by Tommy, and Tommy could do anything with the Pater. Flo was their maternal aunt, and, no, not exactly in her first youth, but awfully kind and jolly, and very chari-

table to the poor. She had money, a good deal of money, and got her dresses from Félix in Paris. All the old wives in the neighbourhood cried out shame at her, and said she was daft; but they said the same of Jessie and Tommy—and what harm? It was nothing but pure envy, hatred and malice—and there was the second gong!

"Come away, come away," she cried, "or the Pater will be giving us 'kail through the reek' if we keep the soup waiting."

And we went, Toosie putting in her earrings as we descended the stairs, and hurried headlong to the drawing-room door.

CHAPTER V.

GLENMORE.

"Hang sorrow! Care will kill a cat,
And therefore let's be merry."

—G. WITHER.

THE drawing-room we entered, was not the tartan one of which Toosie had boasted, but a far more ordinary and certainly a more elegant apartment. On the rug, with his back to a roaring fire, stood Mr. Maxwell, a tall, broad-shouldered man, with high cheek bones, a long upper lip and grey whiskers, which met in a fringe under his chin, withal a benevolent, clever face, illuminated by a pair of shrewd grey eyes—blind to his daughter's foibles. He accorded me a most hearty welcome, and handshake, no doubt because I was the friend and guest of his pearl, his pet, his youngest born—in short, his "Toosie."

A young gentleman with a very red moustache, and a dazzling solitaire in his expansive shirt front, now sauntered up, kissed Toosie condescendingly somewhere near her ear, and offered me his limp hand. Of course this was Colin. His two brother officers were standing half surrounded by three ladies in full evening dress, and bandying words and witticisms among them, judging by the shrill peals of laughter, and gruff masculine "haw, haws."

"Oh! here are two more of us," exclaimed Aunt Flo, as they turned round and beheld us. "Toosie and Nellie, but," with an affected giggle and wave of her fan, "you need not notice them; they are only a pair of school girls, and not out."

In spite of this discouraging introduction, Toosie strutted forward and said, "How do you do?" in her best dancing and deportment manner. Then somewhat sharply to her aunt:

"What nonsense, Flo! I am seventeen, as old as *you* were when you came out, twenty-three years ago!"

Poor Aunt Flo received this deadly thrust with a rather hysterical laugh. I felt truly sorry for her, and extremely indignant with her razor-tongued niece; but I said nothing, and stood scarlet, silent and miserable, until Mr. Maxwell led me in to dinner—a splendid repast. I had never dined in state before, never seen a table loaded with massive plate and hothouse flowers, never been waited on by two footmen, never had choice of two soups and two fish! Mr. Maxwell and I discoursed of my journey and the weather and Toosie, and then as the feast wore on, he gradually dropped into narrative, and broader and broader Scotch, and told me many anecdotes and stories, which I am sure were excessively funny, if I could have understood them! One, a truly grisly tale, I *did* comprehend.

"I'll tell you a very strange thing that happened in this verra room, Miss Le Marchant," he said, clearing his throat, "happened eighty years ago, and the room is just as it was then, for I've left the old wainscot and chairs and tables, for it's a sort of historical anecdote. In old days the gentry hereabouts were just awful for drinking and roistering, and turning night into day, and Glenmore, the Laird here, was beyond a' for swearing and wine and wickedness. He feared neither God nor devil, and sat here with his friends roaring songs and shouting oaths, and blaspheming the Almighty, many and many a night. One night in winter time, when all the guests were daft with drink and yelling and yowling like demons, one of them notices the Laird and says very suddenly, 'Glenmore looks gashly.'

"'And weel he may look gashly,' returns another, 'for

he has been with his Maker these two hours—but I did not like to disturb the company.'

"And sure enough, there was Glenmore, deid in his chair, with a grin on his stark face—a fearsome sight; an unstreakit corpse.

"You may be interested to know Miss, that you are sitting in the verra *same* place and the very same chair!"

"Well, I would rather *not* have known it, Mr. Maxwell, if you had asked me," I returned ungratefully.

"Hoot toot, you're na sae nervous!" he retorted with a laugh. "The Laird walks too, but you, you've no need to be feared, he keeps to his own apartments," (there was some comfort in this).

Mr. Maxwell told me various other less intelligible stories, and I never quite knew *when* to laugh, or where the point of the joke appeared, but I did my best, of course, and assumed an air of respectful interest, and threw in "yes" and "no," and "really," and "how extraordinary" at discretion. Nevertheless my eyes and thoughts wandered, and I ventured various looks across the table, and around me. Colin sat over against me, giving his excellent dinner his undivided attention. He was almost bald, and decidedly plain, but he had a young face, a good figure, and wore unimpeachable clothes. There were Flo, Jessie, and Tommy in very smart evening dresses, talking much and eating little. There was one man (name unknown,) with good features, and a superb moustache, but alas! fat, discoursing to Flo and Jessie, on either hand, and seemingly quite equal to the double strain on his attention, and to eating his dinner into the bargain. There was Tommy—and presumably the bear. Tommy was listening to all his remarks with wrapt, upturned countenance, and an air of flattering absorption.

Strange to say, Colin's high boasts had *not* been vain. Captain Karslake was a handsome man, handsomer I had never seen, even in an illustrated Christmas number! He was dark and slight, and not very young in my opinion, for in those early days I thought a man and woman's curfew rang at twenty-five. I suppose he was twenty-eight or thirty. As I gazed at him I caught his eyes and became a guilty scarlet. His glance need not

have caused me even momentary confusion, for it betokened nothing but the most careless and indifferent inspection. I felt a pang (a very foolish pang), because my unfortunate face had barely merited a passing glance. I wished I had been pretty, and that he had taken me in to dinner, and talked to me as he was talking to Tommy. I was but seventeen, and this was my first party—dinner or otherwise. I gazed enviously at Tommy. She was discoursing with great animation; indeed Toosie had told me that "she had a tongue to 'deave' a miller;" but I could see that she was very entertaining, for now and then her companion's face relaxed into a broad smile. She was telling him witty Scotch stories, which he evidently enjoyed. I strained my ears to hear the gist of one of them—letting Mr. Maxwell's tales go to the winds—but all that I could catch was—"Whiskey—and not anither drap, hot or cold."

At last Aunt Flo gave the tardy signal of our release, and we five ladies trooped away to the drawing-room, and some sat on the rug and nursed their knees, and some sat soberly in arm-chairs—but all talked.

"Well," cried Tommy, during a lull, "what do you think of them? Come now?"

"Oh, Captain Orr is far and away the best of the two, plenty to say for himself, and capital fun," replied Aunt Flo; "as to the other, he has not a single idea in his head I should say."

"Heaps of ideas," screamed Tommy; "he is delightful, he is charming, such a gentleman, quite one of the old school, did you see him diving for my bracelet? He never contradicts or interrupts, and has plenty to say for himself when he gets a chance, and, as you can all see, very good looking."

"And well aware of the fact," put in Jessie. "No, give me Captain Orr."

"He asked who you were, Nellie," continued Tommy, "and I said you were a bosom friend of Toosie's, and a school girl, and what do you think he said, shall I tell you?"

"Oh! do," I exclaimed, quivering to know.

"He said, 'You looked like it,' meaning a school girl," she replied, with ill-natured glee.

I felt very much abashed, and began to think that Tommy was undoubtedly the least nice of the three sisters.

"He said that you looked afraid of your own shadow," she continued, remorselessly.

"I told him that it was only shyness; that you had been shut up at school all your life, but that you would soon improve under our care."

Afraid of my own shadow! That I was not; but the sudden change from Madame's routine, and from the quiet retirement of grandmamma's morning room, was so abrupt, that it was not to be wondered at, if I looked subdued and startled. I had never been as it were "loose" in society in all my life, or standing on my own pedestal. I had hitherto posed as one of Madame's young ladies *en masse*. I was not responsible for my own individuality.

As I now sat and listened to the clatter of four tongues around me, and saw that even Toosie was completely at her ease, and grown up, for the time being, and loudly declaring that she would go to the county ball, out or *not*, and was determined to make the very most of her holidays—it occurred to me, that I was foolish to sit there stiff, constrained, and silent. Why not cast off the prim manners I had brought with me from Richmond, and do as others did?

"Well, old head on young shoulders?" said Jessie, giving me a smack on the back, "what are you thinking of? You are looking serious. Are you shocked at us all, you simple little school girl?"

"Not she," replied Toosie, "she is ready for anything, only she has the fear of Madame still before her eyes; she has really more go in her little finger, once she is *started*, than you have in your whole body, only she is a wee bit shy among you all You'll soon show them that you are not afraid of your own shadow, won't you Nell?"

Before I had time to reply, the door opened, and the men, after their usual manner, slouched slowly in, and met with (Captains Orr and Karslake) a very hearty welcome from Jessie and Tommy, whilst I fell into the hands of Colin. Colin and I got on pretty well, con-

sidering that he was the first young man I had ever spoken to, and I gradually threw off my shyness (assuring myself that he could not eat me). I discovered both my courage and my tongue. After a while I found myself bandying words and smart answers, and repartees with him, with just as much ease as if he were one of the girls in my own class. Colin, I could see, was amazed and amused, and, oh! triumph, actually ceased to lounge in the corner of the sofa, and sat up all animation. We exchanged stories, we exchanged riddles, and the sound of his delightful guffaws, now constantly rang through the room, causing the couples to glance over at us with astonishment and envy. I was quite resolved that Captain Karslake should not again have it in his power to say, that I looked "afraid of my own shadow."

I noticed him sending more than one glance in our direction, as he sat nursing his leg and listening to Tommy's most beguiling conversation. What would he think of me *now?* I said to myself. What was this to me? and why should I be so anxious that he should think of me at *all?* I cannot say. I can only declare that I thought a good deal of him as I sat over my fire brushing out my luxuriant locks. I had not fallen in love with him across the dinner table—no one is to run off with that idea—but he was positively the first handsome man I had ever met, and I could not help wishing that he had taken me into the dinner, and that he had spoken to me, and that he had not called me a school girl! However, I would lose no time in shewing him (and every one) that I was an emancipated young lady, whatever the others did (and they went far) I would do too, and possibly outshine.

"What a sly puss you are, Miss Still Waters," said Tommy, embracing me on the stairs the next morning.

"I thought you could not say 'boo to a goose' and you said a good many boos to Colin. How you did flirt with him last night. I never saw anything like it. Don't think of falling in love with him, my sweet child. He would be a horrid husband. I know him well."

"I am not going to fall in love with any one," I

replied, with great emphasis, "but if that was flirting I shall certainly flirt; it's capital fun."

"So it is, but don't be rash at the first and burn your pretty little fingers," giving them a squeeze as she spoke.

"Oh! Captain Karslake, I did not know that you were behind us; these stair carpets are so thick. I hope you have not heard us saying anything we ought not to have said, now have you?"

"I am not bound to commit myself," he returned, with a smile, "but you may rest assured that whatever I have overheard I will never divulge, even under torture—you and Miss—a—Nellie, may rely on my silence and discretion," and in silence he followed us down to breakfast.

There was to be a big shoot the same day, but a pouring wet morning drove men and beaters home, and after luncheon several visitors, providentially invited to afternoon tea, were disgorged by a private omnibus. Luckily they were kindred spirits, and the fun became both fast and furious. The room was cleared and we danced: after this we played post and blind man's buff; and here I was most thoroughly in my element, and romped and ran and dodged, and dived, and shrieked, just as I did at school. Every one entered heartily into the spirit of the thing, except perhaps old Mr. Maxwell and Captain Karslake. The latter I am sure dissembled his feelings, and played "to oblige" and hated it. Certainly Tommy and Toosie were rather free and easy: they pulled his hair, and pinched him (and Toosie's fingers were like nippers), when he was blind man, and in one wild struggle tore a pocket out of his coat, and broke his watch chain. Positively when the first dressing gong sounded, and truce was proclaimed, we all looked as if we had been into action, with red faces, touzled hair—mine was, of course, all down—torn dresses and ragged laces. However, I had enjoyed myself immensely, and never once been caught. A large party sat down to dinner, including the visitors, who had stayed all the afternoon, and as the champagne circulated the fun and stories and wit, such as it was, did likewise. I had been a brilliant success at the blind

man's buff. I had been so active, so nimble, and my pert saucy answers, instead of earning bread and water, were received with shouts of laughter.

I really began to feel very much elated, and to believe that in spite of grandmamma's dismal prophesies I was fated to shine in society after all! Indeed after the first day or two, I was prepared to cut Tommy out on her own ground, not with regard to her bear, for he could not bear me, (this is not a pun) nor any of us. I was convinced of this, although he was courtesy itself, and his civil self-command withstood many a rude shock; still he had a satirical eye, and sometimes to me, that eye spoke volumes. The only thing that held him fast at Glenmore was the sport, and that was magnificent. His friend, Captain Orr, informed me that "he was a capital fellow among men, but did not care for ladies. However, that he could stand a good deal as long as he could have his fill of shooting, and Glenmore moors were ripping." This was not strictly speaking a polite speech, but in our free and easy *ménage* politeness was at a discount. No one showed us much civility excepting Captain Karslake, and *he* did not approve of us, of me especially. I saw it in his eyes as I have already hinted, and laughed in his face, and became more reckless than ever.

How disgusted he looked when he came upon Colin and me in a little drawing-room, Colin standing with his mouth as open as any shark's, and I at six yards' distance aiming chocolates at that capacious feature, making capital shots too, amidst general applause.

"Will you have a chocolate, Captain Karslake?" I asked, as he stood in the doorway. "Here, catch," aiming one straight at his nose, which, however, he fielded neatly in his left hand, and, with a very stiff inclination for his thanks, he came and sat down amongst the audience; but somehow knowing that he was there, an unsympathetic observer, unnerved me, my shots did not go home as heretofore. I was certain that he was sneering at me in his sleeve, so presently I resigned my post, and a regular battle royal of sweetmeats took place, a *mêlée* in which everyone joined indiscriminately, Captain Karslake acting the part of "Le

Noir Fainéant" at Ashby de la Zouche, and keeping off all assailants with a sofa cushion, and I have no doubt that he considered us fit inmates for Colney Hatch, but Toosie and Jessie liked to take their pleasures frantically. I was said to have more "go" in me than all the others put together, and of course I had to live up to my reputation!

There had been two balls in the neighbourhood; from one of them, at the Nortons, Toosie and I were reluctantly absent, but of course we heard full details from Jessie and Tommy, and were as much surprised and disgusted as they had been themselves, to hear that for *him*, the bear had paid quite marked attention to Lily Norton, and had been openly chaffed about her *en route* home, and had taken it in a bad part—a sign that it was serious.

"She's just the style he is sure to admire," remarked Jessie contemptuously, "very fair, and by way of being very helpless, and feminine and fragile—he should see her appetite! and he does not suspect what a little snak in the grass she is—and how she can flirt, even with married men. I believe he is quite taken with her, and thinks her a refreshing contrast to all of us. By the way" (to me), "Nellie, you are his special horror—you are such a Tom-boy, so reckless, and I don't know what. At any rate he thinks you an awful girl—I got *that* much out of Captain Orr," she concluded triumphantly.

At this I laughed, a not very cordial laugh, and said, "I do not care a button for Captain Karslake;" (all the same I did not like to be told that I was considered "an awful girl") "but I think Captain Orr was very mean to peach; what a fine sneak he must have been at school! I shall certainly tell him so."

"For mercy sake don't! I wrung it from him, bothered and worried, and gave him no peace. I wanted the bear's private opinion of us all, but could get no further. Of course we are every one in the same boat, and I told Captain Orr to tell him what you said about his friend, so that he might not think that he was the only critic on the hearth."

"What, what did I say? I hope it was something bad?" I demanded, with requickened animation.

"Only that it struck you that he always seemed to be saying to himself: 'Whene'er I take my walks abroad, how many fools I see,' and, 'that he was a detestable prig!'"

"Aye, Jessie!" remonstrated Aunt Flo, "that was too bad. Your father likes him so much, and so does old Donald, the Keeper. He is such a good shot; but dearie me, he *is* slow, and takes everything so much in earnest. I hear he was daft, at our putting his boots in his bath."

"Well, thank goodness, he goes back to Maryhill barracks the day after to-morrow, and I don't suppose he will be in any hurry to return again." I observed emphatically; I, who in ten short days—and without any preliminary flutterings—had burst, as it were, from a grub into a very fast young butterfly, and scarcely knew myself at times, so completely had I been carried away by my own wild spirits, my seventeen years, and the potent force of example.

CHAPTER VI.

MINE ENEMY.

"'Tis a naughty night to swim in."
—KING LEAR.

IT was to be the last big beat of the season, and we four ladies were invited to come out and bring—or rather escort—the luncheon. Rough out-of-door amusements were not in the Miss Maxwells' line. However, for once in a way, they did not mind, and started for a certain cairn, got up in corduroy skirts, shooting jackets and glengarries, looking as much like young men as lay in their power. Toosie and I had no costumes of the kind; a tweed jacket, serge skirt, and a deer stalker's cap, was the nearest approach we could make to them. We met the shooting party in good time, and luncheon was thoroughly discussed; the men were hungry and cheerful, for sport had been excellent, and a good mixed bag lay spread out on the heather, including woodcock, pheasants, teal, snipe and hares, both brown and white, for we were at a high altitude. After luncheon, old Mr.

Maxwell took me under his care. I went in his beat, and astonished him by my walking powers, and my prowess in leaping, scrambling, and climbing, my Tom-boy tastes coming well to the fore now. We had Captain Karslake on our line, but we saw very little of him. No doubt he preferred my room to my company, and, indeed, considering the rude remarks I made to him across the cloth at luncheon (my tongue whetted by the stinging recollection of his having called me an "awful girl") no one need wonder at his giving me an uncommonly wide berth.

I noticed that he was a capital shot, and as quick and active as the best gillie among them, though his foot did not happen to be on its native heather. It was getting chilly and late, or rather the sun was setting on this, the shortest day in the year, and a thin milk-white mist was rising, that threw a veil over the whole moor. I had been scrambling along beside my host for some time in silence, and when I did speak, there was no response. I had thought we were within a few yards of each other. when the mist came up, and the sound of rolling pebbles, as I clambered a kind of gravel mound, I had mistaken for his shooting boots coming after me. I stood for some time almost ashamed to call out (this may seem surprising, but it was a fact); and then hearing a distant shot—probably a gun discharged before they went home —I raised my voice and emitted a feeble, quavering cry. No answer, I tried again, a yet more discordant shriek, that might be taken for a night bird, or a crow suffering from influenza. Then I began hastily to descend the hill in the direction from which I had heard the shot fired. It was not merely foggy now, it was actually dark, and a nasty wet drizzle had come on to make matters still more unpleasant—if that were possible. I plunged along doggedly over tussocks, over stones, over rocks, and into pools of water, becoming every moment more wretched and more bewildered, and stopping now and then, to give a kind of quavering scream.

Supposing I were to ramble about like this all night? Supposing I fell into a loch, or down a precipice? I was already pretty well worn out; my clothes wet and draggled, my hair, as usual, loose and dishevelled (too

much hair is really quite unmanageable, as those who have it can testify), so I sat myself down on what felt like a large flat stone, and giving myself up for lost, commenced to keep the rain in countenance by shedding showers of tears. It is by no means an exhilarating sensation to be sitting alone and forlorn, in the midst of a strange bleak landscape, knowing that one's companions are all just trooping down to a capital dinner, in a warm luxurious room, clothed in nice dry clothes, and all in the highest spirits. I sat there it seemed to me for fully two hours, and I was not now merely wet, but perfectly stiff with cold, when at last my ear caught a sound of quick footsteps descending some ground just above me. Now was my time or never, and I stood up and screamed and screamed "Help, Help," in a key that probably resembled a steam whistle.

A hearty "Hullo!" responded; the steps came hastening towards me and a man's voice called out cheerfully, "Is that you, Miss Le Marchant?"

"Yes, it's me," I cried, too miserable to be grammatical. "I have been lost for ages."

All the boldness and sauciness was gone from my speech now, although I knew by his voice that my discoverer was Captain Karslake. He came up and struck a match, and held it in the hollow of his hand, and looked at me keenly. Truly, I was a pretty spectacle,—with my wet garments, wet hair, and tear-stained countenance.

"I wanted to make sure," he said, throwing the match away, "in case you might be playing me some trick."

"Trick! I only wish I was!" I cried indignantly. "I have been rambling about all alone in the dark for hours. I had given myself up for lost."

"It's well I came back. I fancied I heard a cry," he returned. "Mr. Maxwell declared that you had joined the others, but I was not so sure of that, and I thought I would return on chance, although he was very positive."

"It was awfully good of you," now walking on beside him, "and far more than I deserved," I added, overcome by this weight of burning coals upon my head,

"only for you I'd—I'd probably have been frozen to death," and once more I lifted up my voice and wept, at the mere recollection of my miseries.

"Oh, not you!" he returned, with uncomplimentary carelessness. "They would have missed you, and sent a search party, but you managed to get over a great deal of ground since I last saw you. In fact I never expected to find you, and began to think that the old gentleman was right and that I had come on a wild goose chase" (was there any subtle double meaning in this last sentence?), "when I heard a queer kind of sound from the valley, and I could not make sure whether it was your voice or the hooting of an owl," (he was paying me back now for my many rude speeches,) "so I came on, and there you were."

"Is it far—I mean home?" I asked, as I struggled along beside him.

"About five miles. There is a kind of shanty or cottage a mile or so from here, where you can rest and dry your clothes, and perhaps we might find a pony to take you on."

"You seem to know the moor well," I observed, admiringly.

"Yes I do. I was here two years ago, when the shooting was rented by friends of mine, and that's how——"

I am sure he was going to add, "I was so ready to come again," but he pulled himself up in time and said, "I know every perch of it, and hope you will find me a safe guide." The words were hardly out of his mouth, before I tripped over a big root of heather and would have measured my length then and there, only he caught me in time, and said "You had better take my hand, or my arm, Miss Le Marchant, and I'll get you along all right. We will bury the hatchet for this occasion only, if you like." I grasped his offered hand convulsively. How warm and strong it felt in comparison to my own damp limp member, and telling myself what a wretch I had been to have ever flouted my present escort, I clung to him as tenaciously as any octopus, for I was tired, humbled, hungry, and frightened.

How much nicer he was, than I could have believed possible. There was encouragement in his very voice; how lucky it was for me that he should be helping me over this black, wet wilderness, instead of any of those carpet knights, who shone best in the Maxwells' drawing-room, winding silk, or singing love songs.

Captain Karslake neither wound silk, nor sang. He generally talked sport with his host, or took a hand at whist or poker; but oh! what a far more cheerful and trustworthy companion than Captain Orr or Colin in a strait like the present!

How he helped me, I may say lifted me, across burns, led me through gaps, and handed me over broken walls, as if I were a mere child in arms! and I, I was now so tired, as to know neither surprise nor gratitude, only an intense desire to lie down and die—or rest. At last a twinkling light came in view, and we were not long in reaching it. It shone from a cottage standing near the edge of the moor, occupied by a little old woman in a large white cap, who sat spinning in the ingle nook, and who was nearer to my preconceived notions of a witch than any one I had ever seen in all my life; firstly, she was very old, her face seamed with wrinkles; secondly, she was very cross; thirdly, she was nearly bent double, and supported herself with a stick.

"What may ye be wanting?" was her first question as we entered after a long waiting.

"We have lost our way on the moor, and this young lady wishes to dry her clothes and rest, if you will give her house room," replied my escort.

"Come ben then," hobbling back to her wheel. "Dry yer'sels. I'll no hinder ye."

At this ungracious invitation, Captain Karslake drew up a stool for me in front of the hot peat fire, removed my limp and battered hat, and helped me off with my jacket.

"Happen ye'll be strangers?" said the witch curtly.

"Yes."

"Aye and English too. How came ye on the moor?"

"A shooting party from Glenmore, we are staying there."

"Oh aye, so *that* will be it! They have a rare house

full. Queer daft bodies, full of all sorts o'cantrips, a cannie lot, 'heuching' and dancing and drinking. It's a braw thing to have siller; Maxwell has siller, but vara little sense. I mind his forbears, poor bit cotters, no better than my ain—but siller makes the mon. Aye the leddy is perished," looking at my blue fingers and wet hair. "You bide here, sir, and I'll get her some dry clothes, and put hers to the fire. My grand-daughter has some bits of things may fit her for a wee while. You come awa wi' me," hobbling, candle in hand, into an inner room, with a bed in the wall like the berth of a ship, and oh, but the place smelt of peat!

Soon my damp garments were replaced by worsted stockings, a gay woollen petticoat of embarrassing brevity and a blue kind of bedgown, and with hair loosened to dry, and "Kirsty's" Sunday shoes on my feet, I returned to the kitchen and sat sideways to the fire, and dried my long hair, and made the most of my short kirtle, and felt warmer and happier, and altogether better. I was a selfish wretch—for hitherto I had never thought of my deliverer, who, of course, was wet too, but he declared, in answer to my tardy inquiries, that his clothes were rough and thick, and that there was no fear of him.

"As to my hair," taking off his cap and rubbing his hand over his short locks, "there's not much of that to dry," with a smile at my mermaid's locks.

"Did ye ever see the like o' it," exclaimed the witch, looking at me. "It beats a' I ever saw. You're no a' bonnie lassie, but you ha' bonnie hair, and bonnie ankles. And now I'll just infuse ye a cup o' tea, and maybe he," glancing at my companion "would be no worse for a wee drappie o' whiskey."

But Captain Karslake declined alcoholic refreshment, asking permission to smoke instead, and ultimately sharing my oat cake and tea, which was hot, and strong, and most acceptable.

Who would suppose to see us thus hobnobbing over this old woman's peat fire, that we were at daggers drawn in genteel life? No one. I leant back against the wall of the ingle nook, warm, restored, and even complacent, and listened to the rising wind screaming at the key-hole,

rattling at the shutters and howling down the chimney, with luxurious unconcern.

"Most folk would take you two for sweethearts," remarked the old witch, with startling abruptness, "but I know better."

I felt my face becoming hot, as hot as fire.

"You are no very friendly even—but you will be some day."

"I see you can tell fortunes," said my companion, mercifully turning the very personal drift of the conversation into another channel. "Suppose you tell mine. Will you?" half offering his hand.

"Oh aye, I can do that fine," pushing aside her wheel, and taking his hand between her claw-like talons. "You're a bonnie gentleman, and come of good old stock, aye and a brave man, that has seen fighting and will see more," holding the palm of his hand close up to the flame of the candle as she spoke, whilst he stood towering above her, and I looked on with breathless awe and interest. "There's a great disappointment coming to you soon, but it will turn out better than you may think. You are in love with a bonnie English girl, with blue eyes, and hair the colour o' ripe corn."

Here Captain Karslake made a futile attempt to withdraw his hand, and became of a deep brown tan colour, which did duty for a blush.

"Aye, you are main in love with a bonnie lassie you'll no marry, and you'll marry another who has neither beauty, nor siller, but will have both. There's a fine riddle for ye, and ye will have troubles of another's making, but ye will win through all, and live to see your children's children." Suddenly dropping his hand and looking over at me, she said in an imperative cracked voice:

"Now lassie for yours; come, come, let me see it, never be frighted; if there's anything very ill, I'll keep it from you. Aye," nodding her head, as she gripped my trembling fingers, "it's a strange little hand, and no very plain to read. You will git into a trouble soon, aye, before you are twenty. You will marry, aye, *that's* plain, and one you love. You will—you will—— Lord sakes, what's this? Hoot, Toot! thar that will do,"

and she pushed my hand almost violently from her. "No, no, you will no *die* young, that's enough for ye," she added impatiently, but it was not nearly enough for me! What did she mean by turning away, and sitting glowering into the fire, as if she saw something there. What was that I heard her muttering to herself about a dark man—and was the other word murder, or mother?

The sight of my white scared face, roused Captain Karslake from a reverie.

"Permit me, good mother, to cross your palm with gold," he said, placing half a sovereign in her horny hand, "and to ask if there is any donkey, pony, or cart, that would take this young lady back to Glenmore to-night?"

"Donkey nay, but there's a shelty pony in the byre, and if ye lead him doucely he may go kind, but he is a queer contrarie beasty; he's my son's; you will have to hold the lady on, for there's no saddle, man or woman's, and eh, but you'll ha' a sore job!"

"No doubt we can manage; and as it's half-past eight I think we ought to make a start," looking at me. "I daresay you thought it was later, but you know it gets dark before four o'clock. If your things are dry we might be setting off, and I'll go and look up the pony." No sooner said than done, and by the time I had resumed my still somewhat damp dress and jacket, and twisted up my hair, the animal, "the beastie," was at the door awaiting me, with anything but eagerness in its appearance, a shaggy white highland pony, with rope reins and a sulky eye, that seemed to ask what we meant by disturbing him at that time of night. I had not much difficulty in getting on the "beastie's" broad back, and promising to return him honourably the next morning; with farewells, thanks and good speeds, from the witch, we slowly left the door.

It was still three miles from Glenmore, a wild night, an unwilling, and indignant pony, and rough roads. There was no moon, only a flying black wrack overhead, and a few blinking stars. We could just make our way, thanks to the shelty's instincts, and very difficult I found it to keep my balance on his back; I slid, and I slid,

and I recovered — and then I slid again. Finally, Captain Karslake (and it seemed the most natural thing in the world, neither improper nor familiar) kept me firmly in my place, by putting his arm round my waist, and in this affectionate and confidential attitude, did we, two sworn foes, arrive at last, at the thrice welcome door of Glenmore Castle.

CHAPTER VII.

NO ENCORE.

"Thus grief still treads upon the heels of pleasure."
—CONGREVE.

OUR arrival at ten o'clock at night, tired and hungry, was considered nothing more or less than a capital joke on the part of the Misses Maxwell and Aunt Flo. There was no sympathy for me, not even from Toosie! Nothing but shouts of laughter, as I solemnly related my recent experiences, and to my indignant query, as to whether they were not "alarmed at my long absence?" Tommy replied "That they knew Captain Karslake would find me, and that nought was never in danger, and that she herself had once been missing for some hours, and it was the best sport she had ever had in her life."

My white steed, as it stood at the foot of the steps, afforded still greater amusement, ere it was led away to taste oats for the first time in its long life, and I must say that, with the exception of Mr. Maxwell's kind greetings, I felt a good deal hurt and disappointed at my reception, as I made my way upstairs, accompanied by Toosie, who kept up an unceasing stream of questions as I undressed and went to bed.

"Fancy you and Captain Karslake, of all people, rambling about the fells hand in hand. Oh! it's quite, quite, too funny," holding her sides as she spoke.

"I wonder how many 'nasty' speeches you made to one another?" she enquired, with streaming eyes

"Not one," I rejoined emphatically. "At least only one, and that he did not mean, I'm sure."

"Let me hear this one nasty speech at once."

"Oh! he did not intend it, I know; but he said he scarcely knew the difference between my voice and the hooting of an owl!"

"Not mean it! Of *course* he did, and of course you flew at him in turn?"

"No, and never will again; we are capital friends now."

"Ha, ha! a likely story. You were civil because you were in a fright, but you will be as bad as ever to-morrow, of that I am perfectly certain."

But Toosie was quite wrong for once. On the morrow I did not appear early, and I felt a strange reluctance to meet my late companion—why, I could not precisely say—I meant to turn over a new leaf with regard to him, though it was now a little late in the day to mend my manners! All the afternoon I was entirely absorbed in ecstatic preparations for my first ball. Yes, I had no warrant to "come out," but I was going to do so all the same! a distance of four hundred miles from grandmamma lessened my fear of that alarming old lady.

"A small ball in a private house in Scotland. Your grannie would never count it," urged Toosie, when the subject was first mooted; "and I would not be likely to meet any of my partners again," and Toosie's indulgent parent wished us both to go, and had presented us with most exquisite dresses, exactly alike. There they lay, side by side on my bed, like twin-sisters, white tulle over white silk, and silver daisies, I could scarcely take my eyes off them. The head gardener presented each of us with a big white bouquet, and when we were ready, and made our giggling, smirking début in the hall among the other veteran ball-goers, Colin and Captain Orr loudly declared, that we looked for all the world like two young brides! In spite of our toilettes and our youth, we did not (yes, the humbling truth must be confessed) get many partners. We danced with Captain Orr, and one or two of the habitués of Glenmore; but five ladies of one family were rather too much of a good thing to work through with "duty" dances, and there was a preponderance of girls over men, and pretty girls, too, so that for a considerable part of the evening at our first ball, Toosie and I had plenty of time to look about us. In-

"Oh! who runs may read," I answered impulsively. "I am sorry for you, for although she is very pretty, I do not believe she is at all a *nice* girl," I said, glancing at the back of her fair head, which was in our immediate neighbourhood.

"You being such a competent judge of *nice* girls, Miss Le Marchant," was his malicious answer. "However, we won't squabble here. Allow me to put your cup down, and a truce to personalities."

As he turned away, Lily passed him on the arm of her present cavalier; as she did so, she glanced at me in supercilious astonishment, then put up her fan and whispered behind it, with a sympathetic smile:

"A duty dance, with that odious creature! How *good* of you."

My face became as fire, and I was filled with a furious desire for instant revenge, and thrusting my arm inside my partner's, in hot haste, hurried after my foe, closely watching my opportunity. Now had I been about to do some benevolent action, this opportunity would probably have been lacking, but as it happened, it was lying in wait for me in the next corridor! There was a block in front. Lily was just before me, her dress barely touched the ground, but it would suffice—I knew from this instant that I was going to lose caste with all right-minded men and amiable women, but I must paint myself in my true colours, *côute que côute*—I put out my satin slipper in fierce resolve, and rested it firmly on the frail fabric. Then she walked on. I stood still, and oh joy! Oh, revenge! Yards and yards of the tulle came winding and ripping behind her. Naturally she turned about and saw *me*, and no one could wonder that she was excessively angry; but catching sight of my partner, who said to me in a furious whisper, "You did it on purpose," she restrained her wrath, and smiling significantly up into his eyes murmured:

"What *could* you expect?"

I stood by red and sullen, but feeling a wicked pleasure in the conviction, that for at least half an hour, Miss Lily would be *hors de combat* whilst she was being sewn up in the ladies' room.

Captain Karslake's anger and disgust were beyond

utterance, *much* too deep for words; he marched me straight back to my bench, and quitted me with a formal inclination of his head.

He had done with me! I could see that, and I was sorry now (as usual) when it was too late, that I had allowed my indiscreet tongue, and inflammable temper to betray me.

On the whole, as I removed my filmy ball dress (very little the worse for wear) I could not help feeling that my first ball was not exactly *un beau souvenir*—in fact it had been a decided failure.

The next day, we, the Glenmore establishment, were having an entertainment in honor of Christmas eve. It was not intended to be very grand, but on the other hand it was to be very merry. All our nearest neighbours, including Mr. MacGinty, the minister, were upstairs, and there was plenty of reel dancing and whiskey toddy in the kitchen. We acted charades with considerable success. Aunt Flo and Captain Karslake were quite the stars; their readiness, their excellent make-up, and their capital acting, won uproarious applause. I had, in a modest way, acquired some fame as an actress at school, which fact Toosie did not fail to trumpet forth, and I was imperiously pressed into the company as "second leading lady."

The last charade of all was the word Matrimony. The first syllables went off with the greatest *éclât;* and now came the word, the whole word. It was to be a wedding of course. Aunt Flo positively refused to be the bride, and she was wise, for she was nearly old enough to be Captain Karslake's mother, and it was unanimously decided that he and I were to represent the happy pair. The scene was to be that of a regular Scotch wedding, and we were drawn up at a table with all our witnesses, as the curtain between the two rooms, which did duty for a drop scene, was hauled back.

It was not dumb show, not dumb scrambo; we spoke, and Captain Karslake, who was a born actor, forgetting all our little feuds, audibly took me for his life's partner without the smallest hesitation; but he forgot when he uttered these rash words that he was over the border, and so did I. We were in the country of queer

marriage laws, a country in which a few words before witnesses bind a young couple as tightly together, as if the ceremony had been performed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and half-a-dozen of the minor clergy.

I observed some hurried whispering among the audience, some leaning forward, some shaking of heads, especially among the crowd of servants and retainers who occupied forms at the lower end of the room, and I was a good deal surprised that the curtain fell on this, the last and best scene, with so little applause, and there was *no encore!* After we had changed our dresses, we rejoined the rest of the company, and I noticed that some of the women servants eyed me with unusual interest, and I said to myself: "There must be something about me which I have forgotten to take off."

I also noticed that the minister and Mr. Maxwell were talking together very seriously in a distant corner, and that Tommy and Jessie, and one or two of their friends were in convulsions of laughter at some capital joke, but that was a common thing. As I looked round for a seat Toosie accosted me with a rather frightened face and taking me by the arm said:

"Do you hear what they are all saying, Nellie?"

"No, how should I," I asked unconcernedly.

"Why, they say that the marriage just now will stand in reality; that, joke or not, it is in accordance with the laws of Scotland, and that you and Captain Karslake are *man and wife.*"

CHAPTER VIII.

A GREAT SCARE.

"This is the very coinage of your brain."
—HAMLET.

MY feelings on hearing Toosie's astounding communication panted into my ear, were not, as might be expected, those of alarm and dismay. No! I merely believed that this was something quite extra, in the way of a practical joke, that my Scotch school-fellow was endeavouring to play off on my unsophisticated Southern self. I had heard and read of Gretna Green, of its celebrated

blacksmith, and the many runaway couples he had wed, but ours was not a case in point. Captain Karslake and I were quite the reverse of lovers. In fact, I knew that he was in love with another girl, and I was in love with no one: we had only been acting: we were not in earnest; so the only reply I made to Toosie was to burst out laughing in her face. She stared at me steadily with her keen little grey eyes, and then said in an angry whisper:

"Come away with me, Nellie, at once into the little ante-room, and I'll tell you something that will not make you laugh. Father and Mr. MacGinty are in an awful state about it, and here you are taking it as a fine joke; it's no joke at all!"

This solemn announcement rather awed me, and I stole out after her, feeling a good deal abashed, but still fully convinced that it was all a trick, and that she was playing her part *i. e.*, to give me a good fright, extremely and *unusually* well. All the same I was not so easily alarmed. People could not be married off like that I told myself reassuringly; it was utter nonsense.

"See here," said Toosie, closing the door behind her, "you may laugh and Captain Karslake may laugh, but you are both married according to the laws of this country. So Jeanie, the upper housemaid says, so the minister says, and father is just in an awful state of mind. He would not have had such a thing happen in his house for anything, and what will your grandmamma say? Of course it was all a mistake, and you and Captain Karslake can't bear one another, and he says it's rubbish; but that makes no difference; his denying that can't unmarry you, after declaring before fifty witnesses that you were his wife. The question is, What is to be done?" sitting down as she spoke.

"Done," I echoed, "nothing. We will take no notice. Why should we? We are English. Your ridiculous laws are nothing to us. He will marry Lily Norton, and I shall never marry at all."

"Nonsense!" she exclaimed, peevishly. "I wish you would take it more seriously, Nellie. You see you are *my* friend. I brought you up here, and I am responsible for you. I never dreamt of your getting into

such a scrape as *this*, or of Captain Karslake acting such a thing as a marriage in downright earnest, and before any one could stop him; it was quite too utterly dreadful, as Lily Norton would say, and by-the-way, what *will* she say to this? I am sure he intended to marry her, and of course she would have said, Yes."

"And so she may for all *I* care," I returned scornfully. "I never heard of such nonsense as you have been talking, Toosie, never."

"Nonsense," she repeated; "you will soon see that it's no nonsense. You had better come into the book-room and hear all about it for yourself. Come, I know father wants to see you—and you had best get it over. Perhaps they may have thought of something by this time, though I don't see how they can," she added dolefully, as she opened the door into the inner apartment.

Mr. Maxwell was in the library, sitting in a chair before a big writing-table, pulling hard at his grey whiskers and looking very much put out. The minister Mr. MacGinty occupied the rug, with his hands clasped behind him, and apparently had just delivered some kind of oration, for he was hot and excited; Captain Karslake sat opposite to his host, leaning one elbow on the table, and stroking his moustache very fiercely with his hand. He looked exceedingly impatient, not to say angry, with some person or persons unknown. Had it been imagination or reality, that it seemed to me that he said as we entered:

"No, not if there was not another girl on the face of the earth. No, be hanged if I would."

Could he have meant *me?* It was more than probable that he did, and that he was thus rudely repudiating the mere idea of his ever seeking my hand in marriage, I felt—as I sat rather in the background—both pleased and frightened. The notion of all this uproar about a play and about *me*, a school girl, and the chance of being married or not married, to that gloomy young man with his elbows on the table, tickled me immensely. It was the most important scene I had ever figured in, in all my seventeen years.

On the other hand, my sense of self-respect, my dawn-

ing conviction that I was growing up into what is called "a young lady,"—a being far superior to a mere smart school girl, a being who is admired, referred to, and has perhaps a real lover—was sorely outraged by being left in no doubt as to the repugnance with which my fellow-actor regarded me as a possible partner for life. He did not, of course, say anything before me, but from his looks and from remarks gathered from Mr. MacGinty, no room for flattering doubts was left in my humiliated bosom.

A great deal was said—not by me. Words ran high; Captain Karslake just stopped on this side of swearing. After all it seemed there was a loophole, and if we "took no notice ourselves" it would pass, the whole affair become a dead letter and forgotten; so much was allowed for our English ignorance. "Besides, few had noticed it, or thought of it," added Mr. Maxwell soothingly. "It was really Mr. MacGinty who had drawn his attention to it. It would be a warning to Captain Karslake," &c. and &c., and he and I were dismissed with a caution, yet not exactly dismissed, for we were left behind in the library, supper being a magnet that drew others hastily from the room, Mr. Maxwell, to take in his chief lady guest, Mr. MacGinty to satisfy his excellent appetite, and Toosie, I cannot say why she hurried out after them, unless perhaps to give us a chance of reviewing the recent situation from a mutual standpoint.

"Upon my word, Miss Le Marchant," said my companion, rising and wiping his forehead with his handkerchief, "I never got a greater fright in my life, did you?" and he really looked quite pale and shaken.

"Of course I knew it was nonsense," I replied, reddening violently at this more than left-handed compliment.

"Oh! indeed. Well, I was not so sure of that. These Scotch marriages are the queerest things out. You remember that novel of Wilkie Collins, 'The Law and the Lady?' It was an unpremeditated case too! I could not get it out of my head when they were holding forth. You have read the book of course."

"No," I returned sharply; "I never read novels.

Grandmamma only allows me to read some of Sir Walter Scott's."

"Oh, really," with a look of polite amazement. "Well you are well out of it this time. Upon my word I would sooner spend a couple of hours under fire, than go through such another experience as the last thirty minutes," and again he wiped his brow.

I felt extremely indignant. Surely he might have kept his sensations to himself, but I said nothing, for a wonder.

"Ah, I see you think I am not very complimentary," he continued, "but there's no use in my saying anything, and probably putting my foot in it, and making matters worse. I am going away early, to-morrow. It is not likely that we shall ever meet again, but let us part as friends, and say good-bye here," and he held out his hand quite frankly.

"No," I returned, stung past endurance, "I shall not shake hands with you," clenching my hands at my sides.

"Why?" he enquired, with his usual irritating simplicity of style.

"Because I do not like you," nodding my head with a gesture of unutterable contempt; "and I have the greatest pleasure in wishing you good-bye, and hope it is good-bye for ever." So saying I stalked out of the room, leaving him standing alone on the late field of battle.

We did not meet again, for he departed before daylight the next morning. He was gone. Yes, when we assembled at breakfast his place knew him no more. For three delightful weeks longer I enjoyed my holidays, and untrammelled liberty, and played at being grown up, and tendered my mature opinions on every subject, from Agnosticism to Haggis. Although it was winter time, and Caledonia's aspect was both "stern and wild," we made several excursions, and I was charmed with all I saw, from bold Ben Lomond, rising out of its fathomless loch, to beautiful Edinburgh, Princess of cities; even the cutting winds that smote one so cruelly at every street corner, did not cool my enthusiastic admiration—and this is saying much. At length that

black day dawned, the 25th January, when Toosie and I were obliged to return South. I wept almost as copiously as my school-fellow herself, when I took leave of kind Mr. Maxwell, and Jessie, Tommy and Aunt Flo.

Within twenty-four hours our wings were clipped, and we were figuratively caged once more. I must confess that I found considerable difficulty in shaking down at Madame Prévost's, and assimilating myself to her strict ideas. However, my curiously unstudied utterance, stray slips of slang, and a lofty contempt for lessons, was quickly reformed by my excellent school mistress, and after a fortnight's chafing, I settled once more into harness, and the old beaten track. I could have imagined that my late visit was a kind of beautiful dream, only for a daily walk with Toosie, when we fought our battles over again, and spent many moments in happy retrospection.

CHAPTER IX.

LAUNCHED AT LAST.

"Of all the girls that ere was seen,
There's none so fine as Nelly."

—CAREY.

At Easter my school days came to an end. Grandmamma summed up courage to launch me into the giddy vortex of a London season without any further delay; and, curious as it may appear, my "looks" as Morris called them, were decidedly improving!

I had taken quite an unexpected turn—and for the better. My complexion was no longer used as a handle against me, my thin cheeks were filling out, and dressed by a first rate milliner, my hair duly "done" by deft fingered Morris, I scarcely knew myself as I capered ecstatically before the long glass in grandmamma's room (in her absence be it understood). "Why, Nellie Le Marchant," I said to my reflection, "you are quite passable! Fine feathers make fine birds. You are almost as good looking as Flora Fraser, who was thought so much of at our last breaking up. Who

knows but that you may really turn out a swan after all?"

But grandmamma did not intend me to spend my time figuring before looking glasses. No, it soon became evident that I and my smart new frocks were to be seen in public; and then began a regular treadmill daily round of London and London society. I hated it as much as grandmamma herself, for she made no secret of her penance, nor of the fact that she was anxious to get me off her hands most speedily; and with this agreeable end in view, she spared no trouble, no fatigue, no exertion, and no money.

Every afternoon we drove in the Row. I, dressed like the latest fashion plate, seated stiffly beside grandmamma in her Victoria—grannie, who was all outward smiles and geniality, but who would mutter under her parasol:

"Do hold yourself up, Ellen, for goodness sake! Don't poke your head, don't look so gloomy. Lean back if you like, and try to seem at your ease, and as if you were not a little dressmaker, taking carriage exercise for the first time."

It may be imagined how pleasant these airings were to me! How charmingly unconstrained my manners, how ceaseless my flow of conversation!

I noticed (for I am quick enough in some ways) how some people looked at me, looked hard at me, and would evidently ask one another who I was, and answer would be made, and then the querists would stare at me again still more curiously, men and women alike, so that it was not admiration that focussed their eyes on me.

What could be the reason of this? I dared not ask grandmamma. All I would receive in reply would be some stinging little snub.

After our drive, we went to afternoon teas, in grand houses, and to Train teas on drawing-room days (but grandmamma brusquely told some friendly questioner that she never intended me to be presented), where everyone seemed to know everyone, and where I was quite an outsider. Although soft-voiced, daintily-dressed girls would try to engage me in conversation and talk of the season's pictures, the new boy violinist, and the last

day at Sandown, somehow I knew that I was heavy on hand. I did not expand so easily in this atmosphere as in that of the more homely and rollicking society I had met in the North. I am sure they all put me down as stupid and shy, and grandmamma would scold me bitterly all the way home, and say that she was ashamed of me, and my wooden school-girl manners.

Sometimes we went to dinners and dances and occasionally to the theatre. I liked the latter best, and grandmamma's box seemed popular. A good many men, old and middle-aged, came in from time to time, and I, feeling that they were grandmamma's contemporaries, not mine, managed to chatter away to them as I would have done to Mr. Maxwell, and joke quite gaily with these venerable visitors. I did not know that they were every one eligible, wealthy and single, and that it was from among their ranks, that grandmamma was looking for a partner for *me*. She was frankness itself—when in fury—and one day candidly informed me, that I, having no startling good looks, and no fortune, in short, nothing but my youth, bright eyes and slim figure, had no prospect of finding a suitor among eligible young men. But the others, she well knew their weak side, and that with most elderly parties, the older they are the younger their wife must be. Strange to say I listened to this forecast of my future with unruffled tranquillity. I had a large fund of inert stubbornness in my composition (so said Madame Prévost) and in these enlightened times no young woman can be married off without her own consent. One evening we happened to be at the Savoy Theatre, and as I sat in the front of the box, gazing abstractedly about me, I noticed Captain Karslake in the stalls just below. It was during the interval, and he was standing up, coolly surveying the audience, with his back to the stage. I saw him put up his opera-glass and stare at me, as if he could hardly credit the evidence of his own senses. I, the wild, rude Tomboy, was transformed into a quiet, fashionably dressed, London girl, and was perched up aloft, beside a most impressive-looking chaperone, who was literally blazing with diamonds. He looked away, and then looked again. I smiled and bowed with

here. No hysterical shrieks or yells of laughter rend the air. No fear of Captain Karslake enquiring again 'if vivisection was licensed on the premises?' That was one of his nasty speeches to *you*, which is forever embalmed in my memory. Where are you going for the autumn? Is there any chance of a good wind blowing you up to Scotland? Tommy, Flo and Jessie send their love, as well as

"Your affectionate friend,
"TOOSIE MAXWELL."

So here I had the whole story! I am truly sorry to say that grandmamma had it also. She happened to find me reading the letter, and extended two withered, imperious old fingers ere I returned it to its envelope. No doubt the remark about 'my stern grandmamma' sharpened her indignation, but I passed a bad five minutes, whilst grannie delivered a scathing and hostile criticism on the MS. in her hand. Not long after this we went to a large and fashionable ball; not a mere little carpet dance, with one man to play the piano and another the fiddle, but a magnificent crush in a noble house in Belgrave Square. Grandmamma was unusually particular about my dress, indeed it was quite a triumph in white, and with a string of real pearls round my throat, and a monster bouquet in my hand—(Mr. Bellamy's offering), I refrain from giving my own opinion of my appearance, as I do not wish to be thought vain. I was to make my debût in a new circle, on this great occasion, and felt half elated, half frightened, as I nimbly followed grandmamma up the wide staircase, embowered on either side with lovely hothouse flowers. A good many people were hanging about the doorways, for we were late. Grandmamma was always late, on principle, and was also among the first to leave. She did not wish to make herself cheap, and was ruthless regarding my engagements. I was presented to our hostess, partners were presented to me; good dancers, young scions of nobility, guardsmen, and that type, and as I danced well, and perhaps looked well, I had more applicants for dances, than there were dances on my card.

As I paused once to take breath—for I and my partner were dancing for dancing's sake—I noticed Captain Karslake, our eyes met; he was standing with his back against the wall, looking on and pretending to enjoy himself.

Mr. Bellamy, who never danced, was also a fixture against a doorpost, and I noticed that he eyed me with an air of complacent proprietorship, that I found galling and irritating to the last degree. I had accepted his bouquet (under pressure from grandmamma) but it did not in the least follow, that I meant to accept *him*.

After this waltz we found everyone streaming towards the supper-room, and we promptly followed the crowd, both a little breathless, for we had scarcely missed a bar of that dolorous, wailing waltz.

The supper was served at little tables, and at the next table to ours, sat a society matron, with her broad satin back towards us; opposite to her, a good looking Colonel in the Guards was assiduously ministering to her wants. We two young people got on very well, and laughed and chatted and joked too, though probably our conversation was not as witty, or as highly spiced, as that of our neighbours. During a lull in our talk, I could not help overhearing snatches of what our neighbours were saying now and then. I had an unusually sharp sense of hearing, so much so, that at school I was called the "Fairy Finear."

"Not so many pretty faces here to-night as usual," remarked the lady whose face I could not see. "That girl with the pearls, and in white, who dances so keenly, is the belle, so everyone is saying."

"It could not be *me*, could it!" I asked myself, my heart beating fast with amazement and exultation. I held down my head lest the lady's partner should recognise me. If I were really the girl in question, how delightful it would be; it was too good to be true!

"Yes, what eyes, and what a figure. But of course you know who she is, poor girl?" drawled the man.

"No," returned the lady with prompt curiosity, "who is she?"

Then leaning across, something was said in a low tone —something that took a good while to tell. It certainly

could not be about me, that was very plain, but my vanity was damped by the discovery.

"I heard it when I was quite a child," said the lady, (telling a fearful story about her age). "I remember it made a great stir at the time. I had no idea that it was in *that* family; the old woman has certainly brazened it out marvellously, change of name and all; it is rather audacious of her introducing the girl, is it not? As if any man in his senses would marry her!" with a shrug of her capacious shoulders.

"It's hard lines on her too," said her companion compassionately. "It all happened before she was born, I believe, or any way when she was an infant in arms, and yet, as you say, very few people would care to have her in their family. One's wife's father is rather a close connection, and old Mrs. Le Marchant——"

I was listening with both ears now. All my senses seemed concentrated in these two small organs. I held my head erect, my breath coming and going like the flame of a candle in the wind. Then it *was* of me that they were speaking. I was the poor girl whom no one would marry. My father, what, what had he done? I felt cold all over as I sat and stared, with the stare of a basilisk, at the couple over against me, and then the gentleman who had never once glanced in our direction, and whose whole attention had been captivated by his companion, now looked up, looked over, and met my constraining eyes point blank. Had any additional proof been necessary, that it was of me and mine, they had been discoursing, that proof was clearly inscribed on his guilty, white and startled face. Whilst he was still gazing at me, in horrified confusion (for he saw that I had heard all) my partner rose, and offering me his arm said:

"The cotillon is beginning. I know you would not like to miss it; suppose we adjourn?"

In answer to this remark I staggered to my feet and catching his arm, turned on him my (I am certain) ghastly face and said in a kind of hoarse whisper: "Take me—away—take me to grandmamma." No further words could my trembling lips frame: and presently I was seated in the ladies' dressing room, sipping water

from a tumbler, whilst grandmamma, disturbed from an excellent supper, held a bottle of smelling salts in her hand like a pistol, and made swift and sudden charges with it in the direction of my nose. Then the brougham came up. I was wrapped in my mantle and hustled away down the flower-bordered staircase. As we passed under the porch, I noticed Captain Karslake evidently preparing to start also. He looked at me very hard, and there was a strange expression in his eyes. Was it commiseration, had he heard it and did he pity me too? Was he wiser than I was, and acquainted with our skeleton—our family disgrace?

"Now what's the meaning of this fainting fit?" demanded grannie, the instant the door of the brougham was closed. "A love affair—jealousy—the *supper*, or what?"

The darkness, or rather dim light, made me bold; and, moreover, I felt quite desperate, and did not care if she flung me out on the asphalte and drove over me!

"I heard people at the next table talking about me," I began hoarsely.

"Dear me, they had an interesting topic," she sneered.

"And not only of me, of *you*. They said you were very audacious to introduce me into society; they hinted at some terrible disgrace; they called me 'a poor girl,' and said, of course no one would marry me."

For three awful moments, there was an appalling silence. Then she spoke three words, very slowly, as with a great effort:

"Who were they?"

"A lady in pale pink satin, not young, and a tall man, a little bald, and——"

"Yes, yes, yes, wicked, malicious, abominable people, who deserve to be pilloried for their conduct. Yes, I know them, Mrs. Methuen, and Colonel Boxer, my——"

"But grandmamma," I interrupted with feverish haste, "what did my father do, what did he do? Oh *tell* me," clasping my hands together as I spoke. "I ought to know; you will allow that anything is better

than being left in this uncertainty.—I might fancy that it was worse, than it is," I concluded in a whisper.

"You could scarcely do *that*," was the appalling reply. "This disgrace has been my living death—it has withered up all my feelings—it has made me another person," she said fiercely. "I promise you solemnly that you shall hear some day, the day you are married, no sooner."

"That day will *never* dawn," I returned passionately. "I must know, and will know, and know soon. I told you that they said no one would marry me, so you are only putting me off, not that I want to be married, or ever will marry," I added incoherently, "but I must know this about my father. Why should it be kept from me?" and I actually stamped on the floor of the brougham.

"It won't be kept from you for *long*. They said that I had audacity in introducing you, did they? They said that no one would marry you. What will they say when they hear to-morrow, that you are about to make the very best match of the season in point of money, and *that* is the main thing now. Mrs. Seymour Methuen angled for him for her sister, and in vain; what he sees in you I really cannot imagine, but he is absolutely infatuated, and quite one of the richest men in London." She paused, breathless.

"But who is it, grandmamma?" I faltered faintly.

"Why Mr. Bellamy, of course! I noticed his penchant for some time, but was afraid it was too good to be true, and to-night to my great surprise he came to me quite seriously and asked for your hand, in a very proper manner. He knows all, and of course I was only too happy and thankful, you having no prior attachment, to say, yes. Audacity indeed!" charging back on that unlucky word, "I wonder what Mrs. Methuen will say, when she sees your diamonds, your carriages, your entertainments? No doubt *she* will have the audacity to call, and, I need scarcely add, your servants will say 'Not at' home,'" sinking back in the brougham, with a sigh of perspective triumph.

"But grandmamma," I stammered, "I don't wish to marry Mr. Bellamy, I could not do it. I do not even

like him. Please, please don't be vexed with me grandmamma; it is impossible, and from what they hinted, it would be very wrong of me to enter any family."

"Nonsense child, nonsense! You don't know what you are talking about—you are nervous, and tired, and upset. Here we are at home. Morris will go to you first, and give you some hot soup. I always have it after late hours," and patting at my cheek by way of a salute, "we will talk over that other matter in the morning."

CHAPTER XI.

NO ALTERNATIVE.

"Let that suffice, most forcible feeble."
—*Henry IV.*

I SUPPOSE it will scarcely be credited, but nevertheless it is a melancholy fact, that grandmamma prevailed; she was too strong and too determined for me to have the smallest prospect of holding my own. She talked as if the matter was absolutely settled, and looked upon my dislike for the bridegroom, as a mere insignificant detail, unworthy of serious consideration; walking lightly over every obstacle, such as my refusal to see him for three days (no doubt she invented the plea of illness), my passionate entreaties, my floods of tears; no, no, she was not going to allow a chit of eighteen to cross her purpose with sentimental nonsense; the thing was to be done, it was useless for me to flutter against fate.

"If you had a lover I could understand this hysterical folly," she remarked calmly, "but as you have not, there is no possible objection."

"Except that I hate him," I cried out viciously.

"Oh! many love affairs turn to loathing soon enough. It's all the better to begin with a little aversion. I am acting in your best interests, and this time next year, when you are a leader of fashion, the envied of thousands, you will laugh at your present reluctance, and be thanking me on your bended knees."

"Never, never, never," I sobbed. "This time next

year and long before it, if I marry him, I shall be dead and in my grave."

"If you are dead, *that* is naturally understood; but remember, if you don't marry Mr. Bellamy, you must seek another shelter than this roof. Do not allow that fact to slip from your mind. How will you like the *rôle* of nursery governess, on say fourteen pounds per annum, including laundress?" she enquired coolly.

I knew very well that I would not like it at *all;* that grannie was, before all things, a woman of her word, and that I lay between Scylla on one hand and Charybdis on the other—Scylla represented Mr. Bellamy, and Charybdis was grinding poverty, one step above starvation—an outcast from Green Street, earning my daily dry bread. Every battle we fought, during these days, left me more mentally and physically exhausted, and in the end, after grandmamma had painted a most harrowing picture of my poverty, squalor, and misery, as "a mother's help," or nursery governess (not being old enough for anything more remunerative), my hours of toil from six in the morning till midnight, my scanty food and wages, my surroundings, and then in brilliant tints drew a dazzling sketch of the other three alternatives, a country house or two, many friends, all my school fellows on long visits, including even the O'Briens, tribes of servants, lovely dresses, carriages, horses, a yacht, perspective entertainments to Royalty as the climax, I gave in, not gracefully, but with tears, storms of tears. Nevertheless I had uttered the fatal "yes," and next day I appeared to Mr. Bellamy in the shape of his affianced bride! I am sure he must have thought I had been very ill, as he gazed at my eyes sunken into their sockets with weeping. I wonder if he guessed the real truth, as he took my cold limp hand in his, and imprinted a warm kiss upon it. If he had approached my lips, I know I would have screamed, or done something desperate. At first he treated me what I may term *carefully* and courteously, contenting himself with daily visits, daily bouquets, and then a daily drive. We paraded through the park, behind his high stepping chestnuts, at the most crowded time, and every one who was any one, saw us (and made a note of us) and thus the

matter of our engagement was as much advertised, as if it had been published in the morning papers. Indeed a neat little paragraph did appear, setting forth the fact that "Mr. Eustace Frederick Bellamy of Millford Park, and Barham Castle, Yorkshire, and 'Solent Vista,' Isle of Wight, was about to lead to the altar Miss Eleanor Le Marchant, grand-daughter of Mrs. Le Marchant, 99, Green Street, Park Lane." (No mention whatever of Miss Le Marchant's parents.)

Grandmamma continually assured me, that half the girls in London would give their ears to be in my place —and I only wished most heartily, that I saw my way to vacating it!

However, as the days crawled by, I became hardened, and so to speak numb. I had my wonderful settlements dinned into my ears; I was shown my diamonds; I selected my carriages, my lace, my furniture and multitudes of new gowns. All this portion of the arrangement was not so bad, and I liked the novelty of being deferred to and consulted, as if I were a young person of very great importance; but, on the other hand, I hated being alone with my elderly fiancé. I was always in a panic for fear that he would kiss me, or put his arm round my waist, according to the habits and customs of lovers that I had read about—I drew all my experiences, and terrors, from fiction.

I sat bolt upright on a chair (well isolated) and tried to look as grim and unsympathetic as possible, avoided all personalities and discoursed of books, of grandmamma's bronchitis, and the Royal family—of anything and everything but—love.

Sometimes I said to myself, surveying him with a cool, dispassionate gaze, when he was conversing with grannie, would it not be better to give it up? meaning, riches and luxuries and him, and walk forth a beggar, but free. Again "a change would come over the spirit of my dream." I felt an humbling conviction that I was getting fond of ease, and money, extravagance, of stepping cobs, and well hung carriages, of diamond necklets, and many other charming possessions; if not attached to him, I was attached to *them*, and I was aware that I was developing into a calculating, selfish,

mercenary little wretch. Money is power, and I began to realise this fact. Let me confess the humiliating truth, that it was passing sweet to me to be coolly polite, and languidly dignified, to certain of my girl acquaintances who had patronised me when I was only "Mrs. Le Marchant's grand-daughter," and not the future, wealthy, ball-giving Mrs. Bellamy! Besides all the above delights, something else spurred me on to this incongruous match, the knowledge that my wedding day would reveal to me the story of my father's disgrace, crime, or whatever ban I lay under, for his sake. I once summoned up courage to say to my betrothed:

"Mr. Bellamy, you are very good to me" (*àpropos* of a pair of splendid earrings placed in my lap in a velvet case). "I have often wondered *why* you like me?"

"Liking is a mild way of expressing my sentiments, my dearest Eleanor. You are modest, unsophisticated and shy, a most refreshing contrast to the fast girls and hoydens that one meets, and almost the third or fourth time I saw you, I said to myself that you and none other, were the future Mrs. Bellamy," and here he took my hand in both of his, but I instantly removed it and said:

"Grandmamma told me that you knew our family history. *I* do not; but—but—I am given to understand that—how can I say it?—my father did something disgraceful, in short, I being his daughter am under a cloud.—Do you really know this?"

Oh, if he did not, how happy I should be, for here was a grand opportunity to break off our engagement.

"Yes, I know what you mean," he returned, now avoiding my eyes and staring at the carpet.

"It is of no consequence. Mrs. Bellamy has nothing to say to any cloud that may have overshadowed Miss Le Marchant."

"Was it anything very bad?" I asked, in a low voice.

"I may not answer that question."

"Does everyone know?" I continued anxiously.

"No, no, very few; it's so long ago. Why let me see, it happened nineteen years ago, and if I had my way you would never be told. I do not wish to see a cloud on the face that will be the cynosure of every eye

next season. Your's is a style that will improve with maturity. I always intended to be the husband of a pretty wife, and you will be more than pretty."

"I was always considered rather plain at school," I returned ungratefully, "and if you were to see me in an east wind, or with a cold in my head, you would agree with my school fellows."

"School girls are no judges, and when your pink and white companions are faded and *passée*, you will be turning everyone's head, as the embodiment of some Greek goddess!"

"I am afraid you will be disappointed," I said very stiffly.

It seemed very strange to me now, that I should be considered quite good looking, when a year ago, I had been very much the reverse; but such transformations do occasionally take place, in the case of bony, gaunt, growing girls; the shape of my face, then so angular, was now, judges declared, absolutely perfect. My hair, always luxuriant, had settled the question of its colour and become a pretty brown; I wore a fringe, and it suited what people were good enough to call the "classic" shape of my head.

I had also all the advantage of dress—which is saying something—and I could see that grandmamma and Morris were both most agreeably surprised at my appearance; but I myself was not nearly as much elated as I might have been. I felt frightened, frozen, and indifferent to everything. I was mechanically civil to my future husband—but never more than civil—I thanked him prettily for his numerous gifts. I walked with him, drove with him, sat out dances with him, but we never seemed to get to know one another a bit better, despite our constant companionship.

I knew that my crafty grandmamma understood the ingenious manipulation of facts, invented various charming little speeches, that she pretended I had made to her, and repeated them to him. She also impressed upon him my natural timidity, and extreme shyness (grandmamma had never seen me bolstering young men) so he was perfectly content, to all appearances, with his silent, irresponsive *fiancée* and the marriage was hurried

on, oh! so fast! there was to be no time for reflection, or time for retracting, I could see. I was allowed to drift along in a sort of stolid apathy.

I was tried on by milliners, for the most costly and magnificent clothes, I had furs worthy of a Russian Princess, laces, jewels, everything that female vanity could crave for, in the shape of adornment—and yet I was not happy!

I knew no other girls with whom to talk, to compare notes, to discuss the pros and cons of marrying a man I did not care for—simply because grandmamma insisted on it, and I was too much afraid of her to say no—I had no nice young bright companions of my own age in London; grandmamma highly disapproved of gushing girl friendships and always kept me tightly secured to her apronstring, and associated with fashionable young women who had "married money."

A week before the wedding day, the fatal day that loomed before me as if it were to be that of an execution, grandmamma, Mr. Bellamy, and I were at a ball in Grosvenor Street. I had been dancing, and was sitting in a palm-shaded bower off the staircase languidly talking to my partner, who was a friend of Mr. Bellamy's, a very carefully dressed young man, who apparently took a deep interest in me, asked me no end of questions and stared exhaustively at the diamonds that sparkled on my neck, and were well worth looking at. They had cost thousands, and every one knew that my *fiancée* had given them to me, and he was as proud of them as if he were wearing them himself. Indeed, he had confided to me, that he had an intense admiration for and a cultivated taste in lace, furs and diamonds, and that as he was unable to wear them on his own person, the next best thing was seeing them on his wife. (Few wives would have any objection to this sentiment.)

As we talked, my late partner and I, Captain Karslake passed through our alcove. He stopped in front of and held out his hand, as if he was glad to see me and began asking for our mutual friends in the North; we had so much to discuss, that my companion was quite left out of the conversation, and presently rising, and muttering something about "a partner," as he scanned

his programme, he lounged away, and Captain Karslake very promptly seated himself in his place, saying:

"Are you going to dance this, Miss Le Marchant?"

"No," I returned, "though I am engaged for it," examining my card. "The room is much too hot and crowded."

"Then I shall not dance it either, if you will permit me to sit it out with you instead."

"Yes, of course," I responded quite eagerly, glad to see one of the party with whom I had spent last Christmas—last Christmas—that now seemed to have been years ago, and in another planet.

"I would scarcely have recognised you, Miss Le Marchant," he said. "I never saw anyone so much altered in so short a time."

"I hope you think the change for the better?" I returned with a wretched attempt at coquetry.

"Oh, marvellously so, if I may presume to infer that *any* change for the better was possible!"

"You know *that* is nonsense," I replied with a touch of my old plain speaking. "You used to think me a hideous creature, and a tom-boy, and I know, for it was repeated to me, that you called me an 'awful girl.'"

Captain Karslake coloured slightly, but he could not deny the soft impeachment. However, he was, as usual, ready with a retort.

"I think we may cry quits there, Miss Le Marchant. Did you not denounce me as a hateful, conceited prig! I heard you one day with my own ears, but I would never have reminded you of the painful fact only——"

"Yes, and I know that you quoted an expression of Carlyle's about us and said that Toosie and I had 'the voices of ten thousand "Gib cats," all molten into one terrific peal.' Yes, Colin told us. Well, well, all the same, although I detested you then Captain Karslake, I am very glad to see you now," I went on impetuously, "you recall a very pleasant part of my life; when I look back on it I wish I had realised how happy I was then—and I would have made more of it."

"Happy," he echoed, "I should imagine from what I am given to understand that you are ten times happier now. I believe you are engaged to Mr. Bellamy?"

I nodded and looked straight before me.

"Allow me to offer my best congratulations. I have never had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Bellamy, but I hope to make his acquaintance before long."

I mumbled something inarticulate, and tried to swallow down a horrible lump that was rising in my throat; but it kept rising, rising, and although I made a frantic effort to control myself, I felt my lips working and twitching, and two large hot tears rolling down my cheeks. I put up my big white fan, as a kind of screen, but I was too late.

"Is there anything the matter, Miss Le Marchant?" he asked in dismay, "are you ill?"

"Oh, no, no, it's nothing," I returned hurriedly, "only, only I *hate* being congratulated."

He turned quite round and looked at me curiously, and in spite of every effort on my part, a series of tell-tale tears escaped from my eyes. I was behaving like an imbecile I knew. I felt furious with myself. I could not imagine what possessed me! I should have liked to have slapped and pinched my own bare arms—but then he would naturally have supposed that he was dealing with a lunatic.

"May I ask one question? Do not answer it if I am too bold. Is this marriage of your own choice or what? You do not seem very happy—can I help you? Excuse me if I am taking a great liberty, but let me say one word to you, as I would to my own sister. I cannot comprehend—except through one light, the amazing change that has come over you, not merely in appearance but manner; you used to be always the gayest of the gay, the most lighthearted, may I say hoyden—in the world." He paused.

"Yes," I faltered, in a heartbroken voice.

"Now you are an elegant London girl, as sedate as the oldest chaperone. I have watched you not unfrequently, and I have never seen you smile, much less laugh. I congratulate you on your engagement, and you burst into tears."

"But what were you going to say to me that you would say to your sister," I broke in impatiently.

"I say never marry, when you give your hand without

your heart. Do not be dazzled by wealth. Indeed from what I have known of you, I would imagine that money weighed but little in your estimation. A girl of eighteen marrying a man of sixty, is not a very uncommon phenomenon, and in some cases there *may* be love on both sides, but a girl of eighteen marrying a man of sixty for his money, and nothing but his money, is a miserable spectacle! Such a girl I pity indeed from the bottom of my soul. She forfeits her youth—for what is youth handcuffed to age—her happiness, her self-respect, everyone's respect."

"But if she has no alternative?" I burst out. "If she is to be turned out of doors! Oh! *what* am I saying," I cried, "what have I said? Forget it, forget it."

"Better for her to go out charing than to barter herself for money. Were my sister about to take such a fearful leap in the dark, I would rather see her in her coffin, for then I would know that all her troubles for life were over, and in the other case they would be about to commence. Perhaps you will detest me more than ever, Miss Le Marchant, for saying all this, but I speak indeed as your friend, and if I could be the means of dragging you back, from what I feel certain is a fatal step, I am quite ready to risk your anger."

He was leaning towards me speaking very earnestly, his head bent down near mine, I wiping away the traces of my tears with my filmy handkerchief, when my future lord and master came by, and to misquote a line in Aylmer's field, and "neither loved nor liked the thing he *saw*."

He walked straight through, and then returned and stood before us, saying very stiffly, and with a gleam in his eye, that turned my blood to ice:

"So sorry to interrupt your tête-a-tête, Eleanor, but—" and he crooked his elbow towards me in a way that there was *no* mistaking.

Accordingly I rose, bowed to my late adviser, and was led away at once, feeling very much like a naughty child who has been found in mischief.

CHAPTER XII.

A WEDDING DRESS THAT COULD STAND ALONE.

"I only feel—farewell, farewell."
—BYRON.

"LOOK here, Eleanor," said Mr. Bellamy, as he walked me away, "one word is as good as ten in some cases, and I beg to impress upon you, that that kind of thing won't do, either now, or after marriage; do you hear?"

"What —what—do you mean?" I stammered faintly.

"I mean that I won't stand your flirting with any man, young or old. It's disgraceful, it's intolerable, and considering that you are engaged to me—extremely bad form."

"I, *I* flirt?" I echoed, with virtuous indignation.

"Yes, certainly, or else it was an uncommonly good imitation of it; better I never saw; sitting in a bower, behind a big fan, with a fellow's head bent down close to your face," (speaking now with increasing resentment, and more acrimonious aspect) "I won't have it. Don't let me ever see such a thing again. I specially dislike army men."

To this exordium I was dumb, but I looked him steadily in the face—and I have been told, that I had eloquent eyes.

"Eleanor! never show temper; it is thrown away on *me!* You must learn to control those angry eyes of yours. Let me tell you Miss Le Marchant, that you are an uncommonly lucky girl; not a girl in town but envies you, and you take it all quite as a matter of course; and I may go further, and assure you of this—that handsome as you are, it's not every man who would care to call your father's daughter, wife!"

He had cast *les convenances*, courtesy, and charity, to the four winds, and was actually shaking with passion.

I tried hard to speak, yea to retaliate with hot and

furious words, but words would not come, and instead of speaking, to Mr. Bellamy's great disgust, and in the hearing, not to say within view, of three other couples, I burst into tears!

I had been strange and hysterical all the evening, and this was the finale, the climax!

I heard Mr. Bellamy breathe an oath into his moustache, as he hurried me away out of sight.

I was immediately taken home by grandmamma, who was in a fearful state of mind. She did not ask me *this* time "if it was a love affair, jealousy, or the supper." No, she was afraid it was all broken off, and said to me in her most awful manner:

"If at the eleventh hour, anything happens, you dreadful girl, if there is no wedding on Friday next, after all the talk, the triumph, the congratulations, the envy, after all my anxiety, and the immense outlay, I think," speaking very slowly and impressively, "that you will deserve to be put to death."

I made no answer, I got out of the brougham, and walked up to my own room—fully determined that I would not marry Mr. Bellamy. I would die first. There was an expression in his eyes, and a fierce look about his quivering nostrils, that cowed me. I was even more afraid of him now than of grandmamma! (and this is putting the case in a strong aspect.) I would only exchange one gaoler for another, and now or never, was the time when I must strike a blow for freedom. I would speak to-morrow, I would speak plainly, my courage permitting, and it was very high that night as I paced my attic, but alas! with the cold daylight it had fled, and I felt that my valour had ebbed out at my finger tips; the more especially when Mr. Bellamy arrived to do penance, and to eat humble pie, for his outbreak of the previous evening.

"I'm not young you know, Nellie. I am older than you are" (needless to tell me this) "and, to speak the truth, I am a little jealous; you may have meant nothing, and I said things I am—oh—well, that I regret. I've brought a little peace offering," now displaying a superb bracelet, and clasping it on my reluctant arm.—It was a fetter renewed.

I noticed how grandmamma's eyes twinkled with satisfaction, and I knew in my miserable heart, that there was now no escape; that I was engaged again—and for life.

The days to the wedding, how they flashed by! It was evening ere it seemed to me to be more than twelve o'clock; every hour as it sped on, brought me nearer and nearer to the altar, that I looked upon with the same dread, as if I were to be really immolated upon it like another Iphigenia. What sleepless nights I passed, my spirits weighed down by the terrifying spectre of my future fate! The day before the wedding I sounded Mr. Bellamy very timidly on the subject of "putting it off."

"Put it off, and for what reason," he inquired, in a strangely colourless voice, and with an awful stony stare.

"That, that we might get to know one another better—think of it! This time to-morrow we may be married, and it is for *all* our lives," I urged in a piteous whisper.

"Yes, so I should *hope*, and that, as the old saying goes, we may live long, and die happy!"

Then turning full round, he stooped down suddenly, and ere I was aware of his intention, kissed me for the first time on my lips. I shrank back as if I had received a blow; but after all who had a better right to kiss me? I asked myself with a shudder. Nevertheless it seemed to me that my lips were desecrated for ever. He had purchased this right not by love, but with diamonds and laces, and priceless furs, and big settlements.

"Do not talk about putting off our wedding, Nellie," he said, laying a heavy hand upon my unwilling shoulder. "The list of guests and presents has already gone to the papers; it is too late to go back; you belong to *me*."

I glanced up nervously. There was a veiled threat in his eyes, and for by no means the first time in my life, I quailed beneath his gaze. Grandmamma now coming in, and seeing us in such an unusually familiar attitude beamed, and half apologised; and after a short parley with regard to the carriages, and other details connected with the morrow, I was affectionately dismissed for the night—not to my garret. No, no, it would never do for

Mrs. Bellamy to be married from that unseemly, bare apartment: but the spare bed-room which was only second in luxurious comfort to grannie's own bower. It was a lovely moonlight night. I pulled up the blind, and leant out, and saw what glamour that most flattering orb can cast over even a mean little strip of a London back garden! I stared hard at the moon, and she seemed to stare hard at me. Next time I looked at her I would be Mrs. Bellamy! "Mrs. Bellamy!" I repeated the name over and over to myself. I walked about the room in a sort of transport of horror. Was any girl ever in such a strait? I walked, and walked, till I was completely exhausted! I believe that if I had possessed any deadly tooth powder, or poisonous cosmetics, I would have been strongly tempted, to end my wretched life then and there.

About one o'clock I lay down thoroughly worn out, and, strange to say, I *slept*.

When morning came, the morning of my wedding day, I awoke, and all the doubts and terrors of the night came flocking back into my brain. I felt absolutely sick with fear and misery. I told Morris that I would not come downstairs, and pretended to breakfast in my room alone. Grandmamma never rose before twelve o'clock, but for once she would have to bestir herself, for I was to be married at one o'clock—and I dreaded it, as the criminal shrinks from his hour of execution. After my barely tasted meal, Morris did my hair, arranged my travelling dress, and brought in and laid out on the sofa, my wedding garment, in all its glory of brocade, and pearls and ancient lace.

"Now miss," she said briskly, "I'll just go and get your grandmamma's breakfast and make everything ready for her rising, and then the dressmaker will be here and we will finish you, and you can wait up here till the mistress is dressed. The carriage is ordered for half-past twelve, and its eleven o'clock now." So saying, she departed in haste and I, in a tea-gown, stepped out and looked about me. I peeped over the banisters, and beheld half a dozen strange men, going in and out of the dining-room; evidently the déjeuner was on hand. I noticed two staggering along under some tall kind of

white pyramid, presumably the cake. A quantity of fine hired plants, palms and ferns and crotons were standing about the hall waiting to be arranged, and I noticed a great roll of red drugget ready to be laid down outside. I felt as if I was looking at the scaffolding being erected for my own execution, and crept down yet another flight, and peeped into the drawing-room. It had been dressed up for the occasion, and looked very smart and floral. As I stood in the middle of the room, I heard steps, strange steps, and voices, and ran behind a big Japanese screen—a bride had no right to be reconnoitring about the house at that hour—and the bride elect concealed herself hastily, gathering in the skirts of her long pink tea-gown, lest it should betray her and held her breath.

"A pretty little 'ouse," said a man with a heavy tread, who seemed to be carrying something weighty, probably a palm, as he staggered in.

"Aye, it's all that," returned another; "but I'd be sorry to pay the rent all the same. The old lady though has heaps of money I hear; it's a fleabite to her."

"She's a main pretty girl."

"Who, the old woman?" with a chuckle.

"No stupid! The young one, the bride."

"Aye, so I hear. Well *he* is not much to look at, and not what you'd call young either," with another chuckle. "Why blessed if he mightn't be her grandfather."

"Yes, but he has a pot of money, and that's the great thing these times with womankind. No fear but she'll make it fly."

"Oh *will* she!" ironically. "She won't get the chance. He gives her presents now I daresay, but once he has got a young and pretty wife, he will keep her nose to the grinding-stone, you see if he don't! He has an awful temper. I saw a bit of it last year when our folks did his house for a ball, and we ran short of them white Eucharis Lilies. What is *he* doing with white lilies? A nice lily! He's been a bad lot in his day by all accounts," and he snorted scornfully, "and now he is going to marry and settle. Well, he won't do it younger. That fern in the window, and the palm here, I think that's about right. We may as well go down for another

cargo," and they tramped out, and I, needless to mention, seeing the coast clear, crept from my hiding place, and tore upstairs.

I had come to a decision, as I knelt with a throbbing heart behind the screen. I would not be married at *all!* I would run away. Yes, whilst Morris was occupied with grandmamma's very lengthy toilet, I would take opportunity at the flood, and make my escape somehow. I would take the train to Holyhead. I would take ship to Ireland, I would flee to the O'Briens! Presently the forewoman of a well-known dress-maker arrived to put on my wedding gown, whilst I stood before the glass as stiff as a dummy figure, wondering how long it would take me to get out of it, and counting up my money in my head. I had not much, but grandmamma had given me a five-pound note—so that I might not go to my husband with an empty purse—and this five-pound note, and about thirty shillings in silver, was my all. I stood still as a statue, reckoning up my money, and trying to make up my mind as to what necessary garments I would take, and how? In a large travelling bag in my hand? My heart beat, and my hands trembled as I made my plans.

My dress fitted like a glove, but I looked ghastly pale. However, my looks and tremors were quite proper to the occasion! My wreath and veil were carefully adjusted, with a deferential touch—that convinced me that the dressmaker had heard that I was making a splendid match, and was likely to be an important client. My diamonds were put on, my train arranged, my gloves handed to me, my bouquet placed near me, and I was ready. I had only to wait till grandmamma's toilet was complete, and the carriage came round to transport me to church, and my bridegroom!

"Morris," I said, in a shaky voice, holding my bouquet to my face, "you will be some time, won't you?"

"About half an hour, Miss, maybe more. I'll be as quick as ever I can. Dear me, you *do* look white. I'll just fetch you up a little salvolatile."

"No, no, no," waving her offer away. "I want nothing, and don't let any one come near me—I—I—wish to be alone."

From the expression of Morris' face, I am convinced that she supposed that I wished to engage in prayer, and soon I had my desire. I rushed to the door and locked it. Then I tore off my wreath, my veil, removed my diamonds, and stepped out of my costly wedding gown, which actually remained half standing, just as I had left it, in the middle of the floor. I then dragged forth a good dark dress, and put it on with feverish haste, also a jacket, hat, and veil, I removed my satin shoes, and replaced them by a pair of strong buttoned boots, over my lovely pearl silk stockings. Then I seized a large travelling handbag, crammed it with underlinen, brushes, shoes, and all the necessary things I could gather without touching my trousseau, for I wanted to carry away as much as possible, knowing that henceforth I would be very poor, and not have the wherewithal to purchase clothes for many a long day.

So in frenzied haste I stuffed in boots, gloves, stockings, handkerchiefs, my watch, work case and such small gear, until the bag was half choking and full to the very lock. I would leave *no* note—what excuse had I to make? My conduct was indefensible—silence is golden. I glanced round, there stood two new black portmanteaus with "Mrs. Bellamy" painted on them, in vivid white letters, there lay my wreath, and veil, and diamonds! There were my satin slippers—with half the room between them, as they had been flung off—there stood my empty wedding-dress, so rich and independent. I tied a very thick, black veil over my face, took up the bag, unlocked the door very gently, and peered out.

There was not a sound on the next landing, and I sped swiftly down like a criminal flying for her life. I looked over into the hall, it was just twelve o'clock. The drugget was unrolled, the plants were in their places the strange men were busy in the dining-room, and shrill gay female laughter, assured me that the housemaids were there also.

There was only one man in the hall, and his back was towards me so far. Now was my time, now—*now!* I flew downstairs, skimmed across the red carpet, and out and away down the steps. *He* saw me, but he only,

and of course it never dawned upon his non-imaginative mind, that in me, he saw the bride!

I hailed a passing hansom and told him to drive to Euston. Yes, my mind was made up as to my destination. I was going to the O'Briens—to my mother's side of the house. They would surely shelter me, for often and often had they given me pressing invitations to visit them in their Irish home, not recently it was true, and Mary's letters had been very short and fitful for the last eighteen months; however, I was *en route* to my Irish kindred, and I knew that if Irish hospitality was not a myth, that with them I would be welcome, whilst I looked about me for a situation. I did not telegraph, for fear that grandmamma might seek me there. No, I would go without any announcement, and give them all a pleasant surprise.

Just at the moment when I ought to have been taking my seat in the carriage beside grandmamma and starting for church, I was taking a second-class ticket (single) for Holyhead and Kingstown. However, I discovered to my great dismay that my train did not leave till six o'clock. How I skulked in the waiting-room, starting at every new arrival, how I stayed my hunger with ancient bath buns and flat lemonade, need not be here detailed. As to the scene that was probably taking place at 299, Green Street, Park Lane, I dared not suffer my mind to dwell on it; a glance at it—made me tremble all over. I shivered when I thought of grandmamma's face, when her eyes fell for the first time on my empty wedding dress.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. O'BRIEN IS WANTED.

I TRAVELLED in a rather crowded compartment, with a very Irish set of young people, who ate strawberries and cakes, at intervals, the whole way; and, having only one book (a magazine) between four of them, the proprietor most generously tore it up, divided it into four fair portions, which she shared with her three friends. Their gaiety, good looks, and extraordinary

supply of animal spirits, diverted my thoughts from dwelling on the fearful scene I was leaving behind me. We had a smooth passage over to Dublin, and I was rumbled across to my terminus in a very dilapidated four-wheeler—not having sufficient courage to trust myself to that, to me, novel vehicle, an outside car—I caught my train, as the cabby humourously remarked, by "just the paring of my nail," and six hours of railway journey brought me to my destination, the very considerable station of Ballymacarrot. This outlandish title eminently fitted the town, which was about five minutes' walk from the railway. There were long, steep streets, lined with houses of a most heterogeneous description. A hovel and a hotel stood boldly side by side, the forge was next door to a spick and span local bank, and the ruins of a fine old castle were elbowed by a pawn-shop. There seemed to be a good deal of stir in the place: outside cars and asses' carts crowded the main street. This was market-day and court-day, so a garrulous, apple-cheeked station-master informed me; and emboldened by his beaming countenance, I asked the way to Mr. O'Brien's of Billy Park.

"Oh, is it Billy Park?" echoed he; "it's a good four miles off, but this being court day, himself is bid to be in, and sure he'll drive you out."

"When can I see him?"

"Faix in the court house, and on the bench. He is one of the Magistrates, aye and a D. L. into the bargain; but if you like to step up to the hotel next door, you could send him in a bit of a note. Is he expecting you, Miss?" I coloured and shook my head.

"Well, whoever ye are, ye are bound to be welcome at Billy Park, Miss; faix that was the place in old days, no one ever went inside the gates but was asked if he had a mouth on him?—and for drinking and dancing, and driving and riding, and young ladies, there was not a place like it within four counties. I'll just step up the street with you, as far as the hotel, and ye may as well lave your luggage here."

"Yes, thank you, I have very little," I replied, gratefully accepting his escort. "I hope I am not putting you to any inconvenience?"

"Not the laste in the world," trudging beside me in the white, dusty road. "I'm going home to dinner, and time for me, she was an hour late?"

"She?" I echoed.

"Why, the mail? Pat Clancy, the guard, has a notion of a young woman in the refreshment place at Ballybought. Ye wor there half-an-hour. I hope we mayn't be having a smash one of these days."

"The train was very slow."

"Maybe, but if we are slow we are *sure*, the saints be praised. Better take your time and spare your neck. All their stories about engine-drivers getting out for a smoke, or to dig their potaturs along the line, is all lies. We keep a good average rate and no accidents. We never had but a couple of bad ones, and in England they have them by the dozen. And here's the hotel, Miss, the 'Harp and Wolf.'"

"Mrs. Mulligan," accosting a fat woman with a little red and black shawl pinned over her portly presence with enormous brass pins, "this young lady is looking for Mr. O'Brien; send word in to him, will ye, and give her a sate in the coffee-room. I must be after laving you (to me), for I've only forty minutes before the next mixed is due. Oh, don't mention it, the trouble was no trouble but a pleasure and an honour," and taking off his billycock he hastened away, leaving me alone with Mrs. Mulligan, who politely introduced me into a long, low apartment, papered with dark "flock" paper, and reeking of whiskey, porter, fried onions, and stale cheese. First of all, she planted me in a roomy horsehair chair at the head of the table, and then proceeded to offer me in turn, tea, porter, buttermilk, and whiskey and water, all of which I courteously but firmly declined, and feeling that she could do no more for me, she despatched an emissary to tell Mr. O'Brien that "he was wanted at the 'Harp and Wolf' by a young lady!"

"Would you like to send a note, Miss? Here wait Patsey," to a barefooted boy.

"No, no," I returned hastily, "just say that I want to see him." The boy had sped away ere I added, "Tell my uncle that I am here."

"Your *what* did you say, Miss?" repeated Mrs.

Mulligan, becoming very red, and surveying me somewhat severely.

"My uncle, Mr. O'Brien."

"Faix, where would *he* get a niece?" she demanded rudely.

"I am his sister's child," I responded, very stiffly, wondering if it was usual in Ireland to thus account for oneself to every strange landlady. Her broad face elongated, and her little grey eyes seemed starting out of their sockets, as she exclaimed:

"Och! Miss Ellen's daughter, and well to be sure, well, to be sure! Well, if this doesn't bate Banagher!"

After staring at me in profound silence for nearly a whole minute, she turned and waddled out of the room, and as she went, I heard her muttering: "May the Heavens be her bed; *she* was a darlin' craturé, but she made a bad hand of herself, that was a terrible business, and a grown-up daughter! to think of it?"

Thus I was left in solitude, to meditate over what the terrible business might be. My meditations were not very lively—indeed lively thoughts would have been out of place in such a room, with its black horsehair furniture, and dingy windows, and for its only embellishment two stained, cracked copies of Martin's awful pictures of the end of the world. Whatever my father had done, it was an offence that apparently could *not* be lived down and forgotten. It was *forgery*. I had long made up my mind to that; however, I was going among relatives, who, if they resembled Mary, would keep nothing from me (bad or good) and I would soon know all. In about half-an-hour Mrs. Mulligan returned, and throwing the door open, till it shivered on its hinges, said:

"Here's Mr. O'Brien for ye now! Mr. O'Brien, sor, this is the young lady, as was asking for ye."

An active little gentleman, with grey hair and very dark eyes, and mutton-chop whiskers, came quickly towards me, as if time was an object to him, and he wanted to get the interview over.

"Well, ma'am," he said briskly, "what can I do for you?" He spoke with that pleasant touch of the brogue.

As I rose and looked at him, standing in the full

light, he stopped suddenly, his face underwent a remarkable change, and he exclaimed:

"*Ellen!* no, I mean Ellen's daughter."

"Yes," I replied, "I am your niece, Ellen Le Marchant."

"Oh, of course, and I might have guessed it at once;" holding out both his hands, he added eagerly, "you are very welcome, niece Ellen; but how did you come here?" and he hesitated, and stared hard at me, in evident bewilderment.

I glanced over to where Mrs. Mulligan was standing, holding the door handle in her hand, and making no secret of the interest she took in our conversation. Accepting the hint, he said:

"That will do, thank you, Mrs. Mulligan: that will do; we need not detain you. Please shut the door." And Mrs. Mulligan retired, with undisguised reluctance, possibly to apply herself to the keyhole.

"I thought——" began my uncle.

"You thought I was to have been married yesterday," I said, helping him out. I was not afraid of this spare little grizzled gentleman, with his kind brown eyes and shabby frock coat.

"No; when it came to the very last moment, I found I could not marry Mr. Bellamy, and I ran away. Please don't be angry with me, uncle John."

Uncle John opened his mouth, and endeavoured to speak, but failed. My announcement had deprived him of the use of his tongue.

"If you will let me stay with you for a little time, a few weeks, uncle, it will be a great favour to me, just till I get a situation as governess."

"Situation as governess! when you might have married a man with thousands a year."

"Yes, but what a man, you don't know him. I would rather earn my bread by plain sewing, than be Mr. Bellamy's wife."

"You need never earn your bread, my dear, as long as I live; as long as I have a roof and a loaf, they are both heartily welcome to your mother's daughter; you shall be one of ourselves, if you choose poverty and to cast in your lot with us. Indeed it's not much we have to

share with you—I wish it was more for your sake. What with starting the two boys, and bad years, and heavy mortgages and jointures on the property, that have to be paid to the very *hour*, I declare I am often at my wits' end for a shilling; but rich or poor, I am your own uncle, and delighted to see you, and you must just take us as you find us, and make yourself at home. Mona and Posie are doing a little shopping up the street, and they send their parcels and put up the cover car here, they will——"

"Talking to a young lady," said a shrill treble voice, as the door suddenly opened, and two tall shabbily-dressed girls entered, laden with brown paper parcels.

The tallest and foremost halted, and deliberately emptying her packages on the table, stared at her father, and then at me, with an air of superb amazement.

"Who do you think this is, Mona?" said my uncle, giving me a little push towards her. "Girls, this is your cousin Ellen."

"Nonsense, Daddy, how can you be so silly?" she exclaimed. "My cousin Ellen was married yesterday, and we have just sent over to Toomey's to try if we can get an *Irish Times* to see if the wedding is in it," eyeing me most suspiciously as she spoke.

"Well, my dear Mona, you might have saved yourself the trouble, for the bride changed her mind and ran away to her mother's people. This is your cousin Ellen, I can assure you, although you will do nothing but stare in her face—instead of bidding her welcome."

The effect of this announcement was comic in the extreme. Mona sat down, as if she had been knocked down, and clasping her hands in her lap, stared at me harder than ever. The other cousin, Posie, a girl with handsome brown eyes, and a very bright colour, was still equal to keeping her feet, but ejaculated at intervals: "Impossible! Impossible! I can't believe it."

"Well, I'll leave her to tell her own story," said Uncle, taking up his hat. "I must go back to the bench; she can have my seat in the car, for I am dining with Lawyer Sharpe, and I'll walk home."

"Dining with Lawyer Sharpe," echoed Mona, as her

father left us. "I know what *that* means, it means borrowing money—weary, weary, money. Well, cousin Ellen, we are very glad to see you," she said, kissing me; what a nice soft cool cheek! "very glad indeed, though at first we thought it was a hoax of father's; but, poor man, he has not the spirit to make a joke now. Posie, we may as well order the car round, Ellen will be thankful to get home, and she will tell us the whole of her story on the road, won't you, Ellen? When I look at you, I can scarcely believe that you are our grand London cousin."

"Only your cousin, and anything but grand," I returned, with anxious repudiation.

"Oh, we shall soon find *that* out for ourselves!" returned Posie bluntly; "but Mary said you *were* grand; that you never wore a collar and cuffs twice, and all your dresses were made on silk, and that you could not eat salt butter, and never spoke to the servants."

"We were not allowed to speak to the servants," I began apologetically, but before I could exculpate myself further, the cover car was at the door.

I do not suppose that many people, save those living in remote parts of Ireland, have ever seen that instrument of torture, a cover car—a vehicle now introduced to me for the first time. How can I describe it? It was like a tall black box on two wheels, so much down behind, that it looked on the point of turning a summersault and capsizing horse and driver. There were two tiny windows at the sides, about the size of a sheet of note-paper; the door was at the back. We struggled in and seated ourselves, filling up the spaces with all manner of parcels, from red herrings and Indian meal to a box of chocolate creams and three pints of champagne. When the last packages had been stowed away, we jogged off behind a great black plough horse with a long tail, and only that I sat near the door, I believe I would have found the road to Billy Park, a great deal more unpleasant than the Irish Channel.

"And now," said Mona, as we cleared the town, "now that we are snug and comfortable, do tell us why you did not marry Mr. Bellamy yesterday?"

"I could not endure him," I answered promptly, "and

when it came to the very last hour, I felt I would rather die than marry him; so when Morris was dressing grandmamma, I took off my wedding dress, and put on the first thing I could find and came away. I am only going to stay with you for a little time, till I get some situation."

"As what?" inquired Posie, opening her eyes very wide.

"Governess, mother's help, anything," vaguely.

"You shall stay with us and be as welcome as the flowers in May," said Mona. "You are our own cousin; next thing to being our *sister;* but I am afraid you will find it an awful change after London, where you had carriages and servants and everything you could wish for. We heard all about you, and the grand match you were making, and envied you very much, I can assure you."

"There was no need for that, if you only knew all. (Everything I could wish for indeed!) As to the grand match, that was grandmamma's doing, not mine. I would a thousand times rather dig potatoes, like a woman I saw as I came along in the train, than marry Mr. Bellamy. Money is not everything."

"No, my sweet cousin," said Mona, suavely; "but money goes a long way, and digging potatoes is not as easy as it looks! I only wish Mr. Bellamy, had offered himself and his thousands *to me.* I would have married him like a shot."

"Not if you knew him," I returned, emphatically; "it is all very well to say this here, never having seen the man."

"Why? Was he so repulsively ugly?"

"No, he was not, but he had such sleek, cat-like ways, and such *claws.* Once he were married to you, you would be his mouse, and nothing else, as long as ever you and he lived."

"And that you utterly refused to be," said Mona, "in spite of old Mrs. Le Marchant! Where did you find the courage to run away?"

"The courage of despair I suppose," I answered gravely.

"Well, Mrs. Le Marchant shan't get hold of you, even

if she comes herself, you may rely on *that;* we are none of us greatly attached to the old dame, and although we are almost paupers, I believe you will be more comfortable at Billy Park."

"That is if she can do without a carriage and a maid," interrupted Posie, the outspoken.

"More in your element at Billy Park," continued Mona, "than boxed up in London with your awful grandmamma. Mary is away in Belfast. One of our brothers, Tom, is in New Zealand, and Brian is in India; so there is no one at home but mother. We had better take you up to her at once. You know she is a great invalid, poor dear; she has quite lost the use of her limbs, and has not been downstairs these four years and more."

"It will be five years next October," supplemented Posie.

"And here we are at the park. I am sure you are thankful to be at your journey's end and *at home*," said Mona, giving my hand a kind little squeeze. "You must not mind our shortcomings, nor pay the slightest attention to Posie, and her queer, blunt speeches. I tell you this before her face. She can't help herself, poor creature! She must always be in the opposition—but she is really quite harmless!"

"Mona," said her younger sister, majestically, "if I were you I would leave Ellen to discover our characters for herself. She won't be *long* before she finds out who is the fool in this family!"

"According to your theory, she will not have far to seek," retorted Mona, with a laugh; "for what can surpass a girl, who has just run away from twenty thousand a year," with a playful nod at me.

And here we halted at the entrance gates, which were opened by a bare-legged urchin, who surveyed me with open-mouthed astonishment, and scarcely seemed to hear Posie, when she leant out of the window, and charged him in a loud, authoritative voice, "To tell his mother to send home the washing before eight o'clock—and to mind how she mangled the table cloths."

CHAPTER XIV.

BILLY PARK.

"My friends were poor but honest."

THE avenue approaching Billy Park house was of imposing length, but to my irreverent eye, somewhat resembled a toothless mouth! for it was lined with two melancholy rows of stumps and mounds, where long lines of ancient elms, had once been, and were not.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mona, "you are looking at the graves of the poor old trees! They speak for themselves, don't they? They had to go five years ago. Father said he felt as if he was having his fingers chopped off, when he heard the hatchet at work. If we could only have the roots stubbed up, no new comer would be any the wiser. In old days, the avenue was the great feature of Billy Park."

"Why is it called Billy Park?" I enquired.

"Indeed, you may well ask," returned Posie. "Belle Park is its real name, but our great uncle Denis, who lived here and rebuilt the house, said he would have no outlandish French gibberish. He was a most eccentric old bachelor, and insisted on being his own architect. That was his notion of a house," nodding at a square white building, which we were approaching.

"And not at all a bad one," I returned, staring out of a tiny front window, and gravely inspecting my new quarters.

"No, only he built it exactly in front of the old mansion, and it was discovered at the eleventh hour, that he had *forgotten the staircase*, and most of the chimneys, and there were no pantries. Large rooms and lots of windows, was his main idea."

"And what did you do; have you to go aloft by ladders?" I asked rather anxiously.

"Of course mistakes were rectified, and there are

plenty of fireplaces and pantries in the old house, but any one can see that the staircase is an afterthought."

In another moment, we were in front of this freak of our ancestor's. A big, commonplace looking house, with a porch and three rows of long narrow windows; a grass flower garden was divided from the Park and the sheep, by a wire railing; and now on a warm sleepy July afternoon, the place looked at its best; picturesque and (possibly worthless) old trees of copper beech, in short, brown petticoats, and limes, full of flowers and bees, spread their green flowing skirts upon the close cropped grass. Far away blue hills, made a faint outline on the horizon. The country around was flat and fertile, and there was a delightful sense of repose and peace, after the roar and bustle of London; here there was not a sound to be heard, save the cawing of a rook and the "hum, hum, hum," of the bees in the limes. I took in all these details with almost a momentary glance, as I stood on the steps, and I also drew in one long delicious sniff of air, loaded with the perfume of roses, sweet pea, and fragrant mignionette, that grew in careless abundance, about the somewhat neglected pleasure ground.

"What is that queer brown strip over there?" I enquired, "it seems to reach for miles and miles."

"The bog, my dear," replied Mona. "Of course you never saw a bog before?"

"Ah, we are going to get in at last," and at this instant the door was opened by a very smart maid, a pretty girl in a neat black dress, and jaunty white cap and apron. She was left to unload the car, and carry in the parcels, whilst my cousins ushered me into the hall, a lofty bare entrance, with one narrow strip of oil cloth, like a pathway down the middle, a couple of benches, an old clock and the head and antlers of an enormous Irish elk for sole furniture. The dining-room was also very large and very bare. True, if the floor was scantily covered, the walls made up for it. They were clothed with portraits of dark bewigged men, and coolly dressed ladies, bobtailed nags and rat-tailed hunters. Still there was a dignity about this shabby-genteel old room, despite its faded woollen curtains, and

thread-bare carpet, for which half the modern mock-antique dining-rooms would have gladly exchanged their bells and doors.

"I'll take you up to see mother at once," said Mona, preceding me upstairs along a bare echoing corridor to a green baize door. "This," she said, "is the entrance to the old house, and where mother lives," as she pushed back the door. We seemed in another house indeed, for we entered a cheerful well-carpeted passage, and met Lucy, the smart maid, coming out of a room, with a little tray in her hand, on which were the remains of a chicken, fruit, and an empty pint bottle of claret.

My aunt's room was so carefully darkened by blinds and curtains, that at first, I could scarcely make her out, but presently I discovered a sofa under a window on which lay a figure propped up with pillows, and covered —although it was a warm July evening—with shawls. She was a fragile little creature, a complete contrast to her tall buxom daughters, with a delicately chiselled, worn face, bright mouse-like eyes, and tiny skeleton hands, loaded with valuable rings. The furniture of the room, was as luxurious in its way as one of mamma's own sanctums—a sharp contrast to the gaunt shabbiness that held its own downstairs. Books were abundant, books, papers and magazines were within reach of the invalid; pretty sketches—water colours—covered the walls, and all manner of choice knicknacs, and old china lay littered about the carpets were Persian, and the chairs of tempting description. "Mother's dressing-room" was indeed an oasis of comfort, in this great barn of a genteel house.

"Who do you think this is, mother?" said Mona, as she led me forward towards the sofa.

The recumbent figure, with a black lace shawl on its head, started up, and as she glanced at me, dropped a book on the floor, with a heavy bang, and uttered a hysterical shriek.

"It's Ellen," she exclaimed, in a wea[k] voice, "Ellen come back to life," now shrinking back among the cushions, and making a gesture of horror and dismay, as if to thrust me away.

"It's Ellen's daughter, your niece Ellen," explained Mona reassuringly. "You have often heard of her, *from Mary.*"

My aunt looked, not unnaturally, greatly bewildered, and twitching her scarf over her head, faltered faintly:

"My dear—I thought—that—*she* was married—*yesterday to Mr. Bellamy. We drank her health,* didn't *we.* I—don't *quite understand.*"

"Yes, we did drink her health, but at the last moment, she found she really could not marry him. You know we heard he was sixty, and so she ran away from us, and here she is! Was she a wicked girl?" ing me a little push nearer the sofa, "was she very ng?"

Come here to me, child. I can't reach you, and let kiss you," smoothing my hair as I knelt beside her. d so you are Ellen's daughter? and as welcome as 's daughter should be. I can't say more, only I fraid after all your London life you will find dull place, and the children," glancing at Mona, vild Irish girls, without a notion of fashion or They actually prefer those shabby old clothes to nes. I am tired of talking to them about new —but they are dear good girls. I don't know should do without them, though they are a little carum. After all, Ellen, you have the same your veins, and it was very Irish of you to run Tell me *what* will your grandmamma say,

ask me Aunt Julia! I dare not think of

now I see you closer, how appallingly like you mother! I never saw such a resemblance, little mole on her temple that I remember used to tease her about it, and she always was for luck. Poor Ellen! we were girls it brings back the best part of my life to I was five years older than her, but what and twenty. I can't call you Ellen child, Nellie. Now Mona, give Nellie her tea best of care of her; put her in the blue let your maid do everything for her. I

am rather knocked up Nellie, but you will come to-morrow, and tell me all about yourself, won't you? Now be sure you have the blue bedroom," these were her last injunctions, as we quitted her room.

"I think we will make no stranger of you, Nellie," said Mona, as she poured out tea, and we discussed hot cakes, brought in, in relays by a red armed Irish servant, with souvenirs of the fowl she had been plucking, among her thick fuzzy hair.

"We are very poor, Nellie, far poorer than mother dreams of. Five years ago, when mother was pretty well and about the house, the avenue was still standing, we had a landau and pair, and father had a couple of hunters. We had also a sufficient staff of servants, ruled by old Leary, the butler, and were no worse off than our neighbours. Now the landau is mouldering in the coach-house—I believe the turkeys lay in it. Old Leary is superannuated and useless, and sits in a corner by the kitchen fire, and our only servants are Nannie—who does the work of three—and Lucy, who looks after mother. Troubles never come singly. First of all, father lost a good deal of money in a speculation, and what with very bad times for everyone, tenants paying scarcely any rent—and borrowing money to pay off mortgages, and borrowing more money to pay off those, he has been getting deeper and deeper into difficulties. Then there were the boys; Brian at Sandhurst, and then in the line, and he forgot, that although he was the eldest son—he was the eldest son of a poor man, and he got into debt."

"You could paper a room with his bills!" put in Posie sharply.

"These debts *had* to be paid, the avenue went towards them. Tom is a dear good fellow, but he had to be started and helped. Of course he will help us in turn, when he can, meanwhile there is nothing so scarce in this house, as money—ready money."

"And my aunt knows nothing?" I stammered.

"No, mother is in blissful ignorance of this awful state of affairs. If she knew it, it would kill her. We manage to keep up appearances in her two rooms; she has a neat servant—she has never *seen* Nannie—nice

dishes, and all the new books and papers, but it's a desperate struggle to manage even this, I can assure you."

"And here am I another burthen," I cried bitterly. "However, at any rate I am young and strong, and have a serviceable pair of hands, and as long as I am here, I am ready to work like a galley slave, if you will only shew me something to do."

"You are no burthen, Nellie," returned Mona. "I hope you have not supposed for a moment I was hinting at that," becoming scarlet. "You will just take Mary's place. She lives with a rich godmother near Belfast, who has adopted her, and now and then she sends us a spare five pound note, and all her old dresses, and not half bad ones. Mary was always the dressy one in this family," glancing at her own well-washed out cotton. I cast a thought to the days, when Mary had disported herself in my garments—what ages ago it seemed!

"We have been going down the hill very rapidly the last year," continued Mona. "We have even sold all the old china that we *dared*—our best pictures, the grand piano, the old Chinese mirrors and carved cabinets, out of the drawing-room, and a whole suite from the dining-room of splendid Irish oak. The only thing remaining is the silver, and some old family lace, and *they* must go soon, unless one of the old aunts dies."

"Why? Will that make a difference?"

"Well, you see, when land was worth a great deal more than it is now, old Uncle Denis, left several heavy jointures on the property. We have two grand aunts, aged upwards of eighty, who not only clamour for their money to the day but even expect it in *advance*, and are always writing and worrying. They take a very large share of the income; then the mortgages take almost all that is left; only that Posie and I earn a little money, we would be in a bad way."

"*How do you earn money?*" I inquired eagerly.

"*We cannot afford to stand idle in the market-place. We do fancy work, not for pleasure, but for profit*: lace making and crochet are the great source of employment to hundreds of poor girls about here, and goodness knows *we* are poor girls. We work for a woman called

Rose MacCarthy, who has what she calls a 'school' of workers. We send in our work, and get orders, or she fetches it herself as a compliment. She disposes of our lace to some agent in Dublin, for double what she pays us, and he sells it to London shops—or even in Paris, for four times what he paid her. The shops in turn must make *their* profit, and so the game goes on! Say, we do an appliqué flounce, at twelve shillings a yard, finding our own thread and cambric—and hard fighting to get that—it will probably fetch five guineas before it has reached its lady wearer. Maddening to think of, is it not? but we cannot help it. Rose MacCarthy is the hardest, most wicked woman at a bargain that ever breathed. She would have made a splendid wife for Shylock. If you have any taste in our line, you can help us substantially. Between Mona and me, we earn thirty shillings a week."

"Only thirty shillings a week!" I exclaimed in dismay.

"Yes, and a very welcome little sum, for what with wine for mother and fruit and books, and Lucy's wages and groceries, it very soon slips through our fingers. We have nothing to spare for hats and gloves. Everything going out, so little coming in. Positively no neighbouring farm girls or dairy maids are poorer in reality, than the Miss O'Briens of Billy Park."

"And Miss Le Marchant," I added eagerly, "I am still worse off. This is your house, your chairs and tables, your land," pointing out of the window. "I have literally nothing in the world but my wits."

"Your face is not bad," remarked Posie, leaning her elbows on the table and calmly surveying me. "It *did* bring you one fortune, and you would not take it."

"No, not with Mr. Bellamy.—I know I treated him very badly, but I would rather beg than marry him."

"I would give anything to have a peep at him and your grandmamma now, and see how they are taking your absence," said Posie playfully.

"And I am thankful to think, that I shall never see either of them again."

"Ah, I suppose you were afraid of them both?"

"Posie has done up Mary's room for you, while you

were with mother," said Mona rising. "Come and see it. We will call it the Blue Room, for the occasion." So saying she led me once more upstairs, into a very clean old-fashioned apartment, with a fireplace in the corner. A big bowl of sweet pea and mignionette had been recently placed on the dressing-table, the lattice windows were open and looked over the dewy meadows, where the scythe had been at work all day, and was now superseded by the corn crake. Everything was white and fresh, and daintily neat. I eyed my little bed with friendly eyes, for I was very tired, and it was not long before I was reposing in the middle of it, fast asleep.

CHAPTER XV.

MAD DOMINICK.

"That he is mad, 'tis true; 'tis true, 'tis pity."
—HAMLET.

THE following morning, I had a long interview with my aunt, who listened to my history with breathless interest and eloquent hands, and made me repeat portions of it over and over again, and specially dwelt upon the contents of my jewel case, and insisted on full and detailed particulars, of every gown in my trousseau.

"What is to be done with them?" she asked pathetically. "They won't be taken back by the dressmaker. Your grandmamma can't wear them herself. Why should they not be sent after you? They are useless to any one else?"

"From what I know of grandmamma," I returned, "she would rather put them in the fire. I believe she will never allow my name to be mentioned to her again, as long as she lives—and indeed I do not wonder."

"Well, at any rate she shall *see* it," said my aunt with sudden resolution. "I shall write to her by this very post. Hand me my blotter, and put an inkstand near me like a good child."

It was in vain, that I endeavoured to turn her from her purpose. She was a resolute little woman, and invariably carried her point. I now began to understand what mental qualms her daughter endured, when she asked to

see some choice cup and saucer, box that otherwise they would have never knowing when it would be called. How lucky it was that the elms of the a small portable property, nor liable to be s appear in aunt's dressing-room!

The letter to grandmamma was written and despa and the prompt answer that arrived by return of p was so terrible in its language, so cutting in its vindictiveness, so little complimentary to *me*, that its recipient, with an unusual streak of colour in her pale cheeks, tore it to fragments with her trembling, wasted fingers, and ordered those fragments into the kitchen fire. Thus ended all intercourse with grandmamma. As days went on, and days lengthened into weeks, I became quite domesticated at Billy Park. I read aloud to aunt Julia, and played and sang to her. She had the only piano in the house in her apartment, but imagined that we practised industriously on the Broadwood in the drawing-room. I penetrated to the kitchen, and discovered Leary, the ancient retainer; a shrivelled little old man, in his dotage, and anec-dotage, seated in an arm chair in a corner near the fire. He still wore a suit of very rusty black and a white tie, and carried what he supposed were the keys of the wine-cellar in his pocket. When first I saw him, it happened to be one of his good days. His mind was more in the melancholy present than the grand triumphant past.

"Yes, Miss," scrambling hastily to his feet, "I'm the butler. I've been sixty years in the family, as master John knows. My uncle was butler here before me—but there's nothing to Buttle now," and he sank down into his seat and burst into stormy tears.

Decidedly I preferred poor old Leary, when he was boasting of the coaches and pairs, and butts of claret of the past, than when he was bewailing the shortcomings of the present, and summoning all our ancestors from the family vault to come and behold the downfall of the O'Briens! Uncle was out all day superintending the saving of the hay, in a dilapidated straw hat and shabby shooting-coat, and Mona and I laboured as hard as any one in turning it, and raking it for nearly a whole week,

...ises of Pat Donelly, (uncle's ...plexion of a mahogany table. ...ors, and worked hard at an order ...ny, and sent out expresses for us when ...quired us. I was a pretty good needle-... soon learned to "draw off patterns," a sit ...ed, to crochet, to do button-hole stitch, and ...eeling," and even the less serious portions of the ...eapest sort of appliqué. I was a rapid worker, and set about learning the "stitches" *con amore*. In a month's time I had quite entered into my new life. The country, freedom, and companionship of my two cousins was delightful to me. I had made myself necessary to aunt. My singing and playing afforded her great pleasure. I reminded her of my mother, and I could read aloud and without fatigue for hours. When I spoke of seeking a situation in Belfast, my relations figuratively rose up at me in a body: "Who was to look over and keep uncle's accounts? Who was to read and play to aunt? Who was to weed and mow the pleasure ground?" Uncle was quite angry at the very idea of his sister's child going out from his house to earn her bread. Aunt Julia wept, and of course *that* settled the matter, which was really clinched by a speech of Posie's.

"You need have *no* qualms of conscience," she said, "and you may send your pride about its business. For you are well *worth* your board and lodging. Indeed, properly speaking, you ought to get a salary as lady help to us and companion to mother. Your good education is of some use now; your music and singing, and arithmetic and needle-work, all come into play here. Consider yourself one of the family. You are one of us as much as Mary, and ten times more useful. She never would get up in the morning; she had quite a pack of cats that she was always letting out of bags to mother, and she had as much idea of making lace and even drawing out a pattern, as old Leary."

So I bid my pride begone, and remained a fixture at Billy Park. I had become very much attached to my relatives—especially to uncle. Poor uncle, what a gentleman he was, and what a gentleman he looked even in clothes that would have been the scorn of Mr.

Bellamy's valet. I pitied him from the bottom of my somewhat hard heart. How cheerful he endeavoured to be with auntie, keeping up that farce of prosperity upstairs, and facing grinding poverty and pinching below. Now and then I saw him pacing to and fro a broad walk under a sun-baked garden wall, his hands behind him, his eyes bent on the ground as if he were looking for some way out of his labyrinth of troubles. He had lost his money (and thereby many friends), he was burthened with an invalid wife, a large family, an extravagant heir, an overweighted estate—and a position in the county!

However, the O'Briens had long since relinquished the struggle of "keeping up appearances." The cover car and long-tailed cart-horse, a pony—whose age was the most respectable thing about him—now comprised the whole stud; and Lucy, Leary and Nannie the staff of domestics. I was determined not to add to the burthens on my uncle's stooping shoulders, and to put mp shoulder to the wheel, to my very utmost strength. I did up my own room. I dusted, washed up cups and saucers, I gardened and went messages to save my cousin's more valuable time, and I often made my way to Rose Macarthy's dingy "school" in the neighbouring town of Drumdear.

When I say neighbouring, I mean three good Irish miles by road, and one and a half across the fields. During one of these excursions, about a month after my arrival from England, I had a very remarkable adventure. I was trudging homewards one warm August evening, laden with an unusual supply of parcels, when just before reaching the boreen that led to our short cut, I noticed a big black retriever coming towards me at a lobbing gallop; his tongue lolled out, his eyes were red and wild, and he snapped from side to side as he ran. No need for me to wonder what the crowd of men were in chase of, with guns and spades and sticks, nor to hear the alarming yells of "Mad dog," "Mad dog." The wretched animal was coming straight for me, as I stood right in the middle of the road literally paralysed with horror, and rooted to the ground. He gave a snarling growl, a spring, a snatch at my dress, and in a second,

a man whom I had not observed, a stone-breaker, seated on a heap of stones, rushed forward, and with a blow of his hammer the dog was dead. It gave one convulsive shudder, and rolled over in the dust at my feet. Now that the danger was past, I was so utterly unnerved and frightened that I let go all my packages, and allowed them to tumble about the road. I looked at the stone-breaker and stammered out my thanks. He was an odd figure, and wore large blue goggles, and was dressed in clothes almost the colour of the heap of stones from which he had so suddenly sprung. He made no audible reply to my spasmodic expressions of gratitude, but occupied himself in gathering my effects with some difficulty, for he seemed to have a kind of palsy in his hands.

"And so ye killed him?" panted one of the pursuers.

"Faix and did it nately, too. The young lady had a desperate escape—entirely. There's another mad dog up at Flynn's at the back of the hill. 'Twas him bit this one. We are going after him now. He's lying in the hay-yard," and they raced on.

"You have certainly saved my life," I said to the stone-breaker, when the excited crowd had thundered by. "I wish it was in my power to shew my gratitude in deeds," feeling for my pocket and my very lean purse.

But my money was repudiated with an emphatic gesture, and in a strange quavering sort of voice, this man in the mask (for between his cap and goggles, no portion of the upper part of his face was visible) said, "Not money—only one favour." He paused and seemed to struggle for speech, and what polite words were these, from an Irish labourer, breaking stones at so much a measure—"Tell me—Tell me—your *name*."

"My name?" He literally seemed to thrill with repressed excitement, and his lips twitched as he spoke. "My name," I replied, "is Ellen Le Marchant, and I live with my uncle, Mr. O'Brien of Billy Park."

This extraordinary man now turned abruptly away, and walked back to where his coat lay on a heap of stones, and placed his hammer very deliberately beside it, then returned to me still silent, but drawing his breath fast, as if he had been running.

"It is getting late," I said, preparing to move on. Prompted by some happy thought, I added, "But before going, I should like to know *your* name."

"My name is Dominick Kelly, my lady."

He spoke with a brogue now. I had not noticed it before. I observed too that his hands were small, but coarse, and worn with hard work, his clothes clean, but ditto to his hands.

"If I may make bold, Miss, I'll walk with you to the back gate; these roads coming on evening, is not very safe."

"Why not?" I enquired: "surely there is no shooting here now—I mean of people?"

"Oh, no fear, there's no shooting at all of *any* sort in these parts, but folks does be saying that there is one or two chaps going about hawking tin cans, that would make no bones of robbing their own mother. You've a gold watch and chain I see."

I had—the one relic of all my ornaments, and this stone-breaker, who so chivalrously waved all monetary compensation had sharp eyes.

"I suppose you are not much acquainted with these parts," he said, as we proceeded up the boreen side by side. "I take it that you are a stranger?"

"Yes, it's my first visit to the country."

"But you were born——?" and he stopped short.

"Yes, that is true. I was born over here. This is my native land; but how did *you* know that?"

"It may seem queer my knowing it, Miss, but Mr. O'Brien and his sister was all that was in it—meaning the family, and of course we of the lower orders take an interest in our betters—may be far more than they do in us—and we like hearing about them. It's as good as a story out of a book sometimes," he paused and walked on in silence for about fifty yards, and then said, in a tremulous voice, "There *is* a queer story in your own family, excuse me speaking of it, Miss."

"Yes," I replied; "I believe there is something—but I have never heard any particulars. I do not know anything about it."

"Not know it!" he echoed in a key that made me start, "not know about the mur——I mean about the—

the accident. Well you will be told all, Miss, one of these days, and a terrible tale it is; but bad as it looks, and black as was the evidence against your father, I swear to heaven—" speaking with quick and sudden vehemence, "that he was as innocent of everything, as I am myself—I knew him well."

"I don't know what he did," I answered in an awe-struck tone; "but I should be only too, too, thankful if I could rely upon what you say, and if I could clear his memory."

"Then you don't shrivel up and shrink away every time his name is mentioned," he demanded, glowering at me through his goggles.

"No"—but what extraordinary language for a stone-breaker!—"no," I repeated, "at any rate his name never *is* mentioned."

"Well, may be it will be cleared yet, and some day I may put a clue in your hands, and prove my words—that is if the clue is to be found."

"And what is the clue?"

"You'll laugh when I tell you, it's a *button.* If the people up at Billy Park hear you have been walking home with me, they'd be in a fine way, for may be I should tell you Miss, though I'm said to be harmless—I'm called *mad* Dominick, the stone-breaker; and now I'll leave you—you are in sight of the gate."

"Stay, stop," I cried. "I want you to tell me more—you say you knew——"

"I know a great deal, Miss, and you must think Ireland a mighty queer country, when a common ignorant man falls to discoursin' to the likes of you, about your family private affairs—but it's not the nature of the country—nor Ireland, that's queer, it's me. I've a slate off, and don't mind me. I don't know what I'm talking of half the time."

"But when you have said so much, you must tell me more," I persisted.

"No, sorra a word, ask your aunt," he answered brusquely, and then turned, and walked quickly away, without once looking back. He had an upright figure for a mad Irish labourer, and carried himself surprisingly well.

At first I determined to keep my adventure to myself
but my resolve melted away under the hot fire of Mona
questions, anent my somewhat battered parcels; and t
my eager and appreciative audience I related at f
length my encounter with the mad dog, and rescue
the stone-breaker, and how he had walked home with m
that is to say, had left me, when I was safely in sight
the gate.

"Well, I must say you had a wonderful esca
exclaimed Mona, after many ejaculations of horror
thankfulness; "but as far as *I* am concerned, I w
nearly as soon have walked home with the mad do
with mad Dominick. He has been on the roads he
the last two or three years, and I confess that I a
perately afraid of him, although he is said to h
quiet, and even comes to our church sometimes—
open his lips to you?"

"Yes."

"And what did he say; did he tell you anythin
himself?"

"Yes," I admitted reluctantly, rising as I spo
moving towards the door. "He told me that he
great interest in his betters, and that—and that
mad—but quite harmless," and then I disappeare

CHAPTER XVI.

AUNT JULIA'S STORY.

"A deed of dreadful note."

—*Mac*

I HAD not been a whole month at Billy Pa
making many enquiries direct and indirect
parents; but my questions had not received
worthy the name. Mona and Posie put me o
saying:

"You had better leave well alone, Nellie
best; you need not mind, it's all forgotten
assured them both with much vehemen
mind very much; that it was anything bu
completely in the dark; that the worst t
better than such complete ignorance
fearful things had been hinted at, in s

esolved never to rest till I knew all. So pertinacious, o passionately pressing was I, the day after my walk ith Dominick, that that same evening Mona came down om the dressing-room, with an unusually grave face, and id:

"Nellie, you are to go up to mother alone; she wishes see you."

had a good idea of what was coming. I was about e told at last, and my heart beat fearfully fast as I nded the bare carpetless staircase, and opened the of aunt's sanctum and walked in. She had been g a little, I think; but as it was almost dusk, I l not be positive on this point.

ome here, dearie," she said rising on her elbow, irls say you are very anxious to hear all about— st, and it is fittest that I should tell you, but I arn you, that you will be far happier if you will k to read the back pages of our family history. I think it will do any good," she urged pleadingly; l only make you very miserable, I know it will."

m prepared to risk all that," I replied firmly. Julia, I know you mean kindly, but I am sure l in your heart that I *ought* to be told. I take onsibility on myself. I promise you that I will eam or faint, and on my own head be all the ence, of knowing the truth about my father."

was a very handsome man," she began in a ice "*very*—half the girls in this part of the e in love with Philip Deane."

!" I echoed sharply.

is your real name, dear, not Le Marchant; ur grandmamma's maiden name. He, Philip, ed with his regiment at Drumdear, just as a quartered there now. This was twenty- Your mother lived with us, and it did not ral, that this handsome young man should ith the prettiest girl in the county, Ellen she with him!

rt wooing. "He was an only son, his own ve his mother was not quite pleased, I, made no objection. It seemed a per- atch in every respect. Ellen had many

admirers, and many suitors. There was an officer
Philip's own regiment, who proposed for her twice, an
quite persecuted her with his addresses, but she woul
have nothing to say to him. He was not at all a nic
man, and Ellen showed her sense. We had a gran
wedding. Those were old rich days!" she added with
sigh. "We had arches of flowers all up the avenue an
over the west entrance, and a grand ball and all manne
of rejoicings, and then the happy pair went away
England, in order that Philip might present his bride
his mother. After a tour to the Lakes, they return
and settled down in a pretty furnished house
outside Drumdear. They seemed to be as happ
the day was long, but I was sorry to see that El
former suitor, constantly frequented the cottage.
had established himself as a kind of 'ami de la m
Ellen, I knew did not like him, but Philip *di*
thought that Mr. Kant displayed both good sense
magnanimity, in accepting the post of friend, and
ing the past altogether! He made himself use
many ways, took Philip's duties, and all that ki
thing, and matters went on smoothly for several m
—the proverbial calm before the storm."

Here Aunt Julia paused, and wiped her lips w
dainty handkerchief, and took a long sniff at her s

"I am sorry to say, that play was very high i
days," she continued. "Gambling was thought
of as smoking; indeed a cousin of ours once
thousand pounds at a whist party, when they
so the story goes—for two days and two ni
were up to their knees in cards—but to retu
own affairs. Most of the officers gambled, yc
included. I believe he was not what is called
player, and Mr. Kant was the very reverse,
father was rich, and the other was not. A ve
foolish poor boy joined, and was immediatel
the same mania, and night after night, the s
and ecarté, used to be something astou
Colonel was a weak man, and would not pu
Ellen, your mother, did all in her power
father at home, and to a great extent succ
happened to be winter, and there was a fr

g, no means of getting out. A certain gang of gamers collected in each other's rooms, and played almost ay and night. One evening there were hot words, high ords, in short a very serious quarrel. Your father ed to keep young Sim, the rich youth, from doubling d trebling his stakes; and there was a violent scene tween him and Kant. Kant was an advocate of the hest play, and your father got up and left. His last rds being audibly shouted back, and subsequently eated, these were: 'You young fool, you don't know t you are bringing on yourself—you will be sorry gh, when it's too late.'"

e next day every one seemed to have cooled down, there was no sign of any friction between the s, and your father and Mr. Sim went up the Vann hooting alone—but Mr. Sim was never seen alive

ou don't mean that my father—"

ait, wait, your father brought the boat home, and brother officer, that as Sim had complained of frozen, he had got out on the bank of the river, ng he would walk home across the country, and re before him. Your father appeared to be amazed that he had not already turned up. No came to mess, no Mr. Sim appeared on parade morning—nor on any other morning. There active search. The police scoured the county, race of the missing man could be discovered. d to have vanished into space.

bye little straws of evidence were collected. membered seeing two young men in a boat. n a punt had heard them talking very loudly, he thought; and your father admitted that r. Sim had renewed the discussion of the ening, and that in consequence of this—as consequence of the cold, and being wet and Sim had landed and gone off across the bog ge. Yes, he had taken a gun with him, y mistake, leaving his own in the boat, and ter the murder, a farm girl who lived not ann, recollected on the night in question, ry, coming home late across the bog, and

hearing strange noises, deep moans and groans, like a sick cow, and being rather frightened she had run, thinking it might be the fairies, or a Banshee, and next morning, passing the same place, she had noticed the ground being trampled down, and picked up a button. Of course there was an outcry for this button at once, but she had given it to the children to play with, and they had lost it. The place where she heard the groans was searched over most carefully, and in a neighbouring deep brown bog hole, his feet tied together with his handkerchief, and a weight of stones attached to them, was found the body of Mr. Sim. It was in perfect preservation, owing to the immersion in bog water, as it had been lying there for fully forty days.

"The immediate cause of death was a charge of in the head. These slugs were those that belonged Philip's gun, which was discovered under a turf cla not far from the place where the body was found. can imagine the sensation when the news flew th the country? The same night a warrant was issu your father's arrest. Proofs were heavy against the quarrel, the gambling, the gun, and the reluctantly avowed by Mr. Kant, as though slipped out unawares—that Deane had lost enc sums to Sim, and also another telling item, Mr pocket book, his memorandum of all his betti losses, and his gains, was *nowhere* to be found.

"Every voice was raised against Philip Dean finger pointed towards him. 'Thou art the m one universal shout. Proofs were so eloquent strong—proofs of his crime: nevertheless no o frame any sufficient good reason as to *why* he mitted it? The quarrel was nothing seriou the losses at cards were not such heavy ones, s but Mr. Kant. He laid great emphasis pointed out this, and drew attention to that, but very forcibly all the same. It certai strange people said, that *he* should be so spe even for the credit of his cloth he shou tongue, and not do all his power, to houn hang a man, whom he had once adopted friend.

"You cannot picture the hubbub in the county nor our feelings, whilst your father lay in gaol waiting to be tried for his life; of course it was entirely circumstantial evidence, but what can be stronger? Your mother believed in his innocence, poor girl. She declared it with her last breath. She sent him a line, the last she penned, saying:

"'I may not live to know it, Philip, but you will be cleared yet.'

"She died the day you were born.

"In spite of special detectives and counsel from London, and vast sums lavished by your grandmamma (who nevertheless believed the worst of her son,) he was found guilty."

I rose, I gasped for air: was she going to tell me that my father had been *hanged!*

"No, no, no," she responded in answer to my ghastly look. "Sit down again. I have nearly finished—It was penal servitude for life."

A long, long pause. I could not articulate. My very brain seemed withered.

"In cases where they have no direct evidence," continued my aunt; "they rarely like to—to——"

I finished in the sentence in my own mind.

"He was sent off to Australia, and very shortly after his arrival there, he died. He would not see any of us before he left, and it was perhaps as well. I'd rather remember him still, as the handsome fellow he was in his boyish undress, and with his merry eyes, and hearty laugh, than as a miserable, broken, haggard man, in convict clothes——" her voice dying away to a whisper.

"——" I began, "I'll never believe he did it, Aunt Ida."

"My dear child, I wish we could *all* think so," shaking her head sadly.

"He had *no* object," I persisted, "none."

"Malice, but he had an exceedingly hot temper. In a fit of passion, and it was but a moment—he struck him. He may have fired his gun, never realising what he was doing, and then horrified, have hidden the body, gone home alone, with the story about the [illegible] a very lonely part of the country, quite

the other side of Drumdear, where the Vann creeps along through marshy lands bordering on the bog, and where there are scarcely any 'cabins.'"

"I shall go and see it some day soon," I said.

"Good gracious child, you would not think of such a thing!" cried Aunt Julia, half rising among her pillows.

"Indeed I would, and will, and must; I believe as my mother did that it will be all all cleared up yet Aunt Julia," leaning over her, and speaking in whisper: "I believe I know *who* did it, and now go downstairs," kissing her as I rose.

"Thank you, very, very much, for telling me must have been most agitating to relate; but it's n bad as I expected."

"My *dear* Nellie!" she ejaculated, in a sho voice. She was no longer tearful, but softly stoical, intensely composed, and eyed me curiously.

"No, Aunt Julia; I have heard that circumst evidence is sometimes wrong, in spite of proofs links, that seem almost to put the rope round a neck. Was *no* one else suspected?"

"No one."

"But the real murderer is yet at large. I am it; certain of it, Aunt Julia."

As I turned the handle of the drawing-roon both my cousins looked up anxiously, and no wo

"Mona and Posie," I said approaching. "everything now, and I no more believe that he did I did it myself—I shall work day and night him."

"Then, did mother tell you all," enquir sharply.

"Yes, all; and I still believe, that my innocent. I shall do my best to clear his m have a strong will, as you know, and plenty and I shall exert it to the utmost."

"But what is the use of going into it now, Posie. "Your father is dead; it can do hi If you will take my advice, you will not st water."

"But I shall," I returned forcibly; "

thing I am going to do, is to get one of you to take me to the place where it happened, and show me the hovel where the girl lived, who found the button."

"But we don't know," said Mona. "I need not tell you, that that is the very last part of the world, in which an *O'Brien* would be seen."

"And as to the girl," added Posie, "she must be a pretty old girl now, and probably went to America years ago—you might as well look for a needle in a hay rick."

"Even so, I'll risk it. I am not going to leave a one unturned, till I find some clue to go upon. If I e to pull down those cabins with my own hands, I'll that button," recalling Dominick's conversation. used to think that forgery——"

Hush! here is Lucy," said Mona; "we must send nother's tea, and talk another time."

CHAPTER XVII.

DOMINICK KELLY'S SECRET.

"One writ with me in sour misfortune's books."

nother was buried in the family grave-yard of the ens, Clonallon: a grave-yard surrounding an t ruined church, on the sunny side of a hill, about from the west entrance to Billy Park. I some- stole away, when my cousins were occupied, and half-an-hour beside a mound just below the window—a mound that had a plain grey slab it, on which was cut nothing but the name " not "Ellen, the beloved wife," or "Ellen, the regretted sister," or even "Ellen Deane," but e Christian name, and no date.

ot go there to cry. I simply went there to sit and would sit for a long time in the late afternoon ing down at the far spreading heather coloured, boggy plain, and a grey straight road that led in a slanting direction to Drumdear, where and piles of barracks were well in view, and d Drumdear to where the Vann crept along, ancholy river. A few evenings after Aunt tions, I hastened up to my occasional resort gazed at that particular part of the lands-

cape—the dismal scene of Mr. Sim's murder, with a n
and awful interest. I must explore it all carefully, an
soon—and alone. The whole story of the murd
trial, in a series of yellow newspapers, was locked up
so Mona had informed me—in uncle's private burea
but he would not allow me to to see them, though I h
asked for them indirectly through Mona and Aunt Jul
Indeed if he *could* be angry with his invalid wife, he w
vexed, that she had yielded to my importunities, and h
made me as wise as the rest of the world. I wanted
hear a great deal more. I wanted to piece differe
things together, but I had not the courage to
people to repeat that dreadful narrative to me o
and over again. I would go alone to the scene
the tragedy, and there, as an unknown inquis
stranger, ask questions that I dare not put in the
racter of Philip Deane's daughter, and I must go
but how? It was nearly seven miles away, and I
have some ostensible errand. *What* errand c
invent, that would take me into those cabins in th
As I sat puzzling my brains, my arms encircl
knees, my eyes bent upon the ground, and my h
on the grass beside me, I was aware of son
scrambling over the low wall to my right. Never
had my solitude been disturbed. I glanced up
and saw my friend in the goggles, coming rapi
the graves towards me.

"Fine evening, Miss," he said, touching his c

"Very fine," I answered shortly.

I was not going to enter into conversat
him if I could help it. I wished he w
away.

"I saw you at church on Sunday," he contin

"Yes."

"Do you often come up here?"

"No," I returned ungraciously.

"I suppose," speaking with considerable
"that you have heard all there was to hear.
told you"—he hesitated, and then stam
"What do you think about"—then he add
whisper, "the murder?"

"I really cannot imagine what business

answered angrily, standing up as I spoke. (To tell he truth I was as much frightened as angry.)

"Only one word—only half a word, young lady!" tretching out both his hands appealingly, whilst his eatures worked with emotion. Crazy as he was, I could ot withstand the thrill of passionate pleading in his voice.

"I think as she did," I said, laying my hand on the ey headstone beside me; and instantly to my unutter- le horror, the poor mad, stone-breaker went down on s knees in the moss, and throwing himself on the ave, broke into tears and loud sobs.

As he lay there with his face buried in his arms, I oped and softly picked up my hat, and turned to al away. I did not feel at all comfortable, in being e with a notorious lunatic in this desolate spot— n sound of nothing but the sheep, the curlew, and rouse.

)on't go," he said, stretching out an arm, and hold- e tightly by the dress. "I have something to say here."

t me go at once, if you please," I cried indig- ; "and what ever you have to say, be quick it; for they are expecting me at home, and will ing to look for me." I added this little fiction, id of protection to myself.

ade no immediate answer, but relinquished his f my dress, and rose deliberately and took off gles, and to my amazement displayed a most face. Though worn and furrowed, it was hand- ill, but its expression was stern and pathetically s. The hair was thin on the temples, and al- ite; the eyes were sunken, and yet there was g in those brilliant hollow eyes, that belied the e of age. More than this, the man before me, s rough coarse hands, and shabby clothes, was, en, a gentleman! I saw it the instant he s cap back, and looked at me with a glance l familiar, in some odd inexplicable way.

astonished at my assurance, I can see," he nge low voice.

ith not unnatural surprise; what had be- rogue?

"But I knew your father and mother well." He stopped for a second, as if something was choking him and then went on with emotion, that no longer brooked control.

"Nay, I cannot dissimulate—I never could, I know that you are a brave girl, Ellen.—You can stand a shock You must bear it some day. Why not now! Oh must tell you, for I can no longer hold my tongue. Your Father is alive!"

I trembled all over from head to foot. I knew what he was about to tell me. My heart was actually fluttering in my throat, but I managed to articulate; and said as I steadied myself by the grave-stone.

"And *you* are my father?"

"You have guessed it," he replied. "I did not after all, and I am glad of it for your sake. It was 4,725 that died, not No. 4,724. A little mistake that makes no difference in returns. Who cares happens to a *lifer?* The only one who would cared, lies *there,*" pointing to the grave. "I am ticket-of-leave. I am known here as Dominick Mad Dominick, the stone-breaker. I'm a good hand that: practice makes perfect. Would anyone suspect to look at me, an old broken ticket-of-leave, that but forty-four years of age—years and years younger than the old rascal my mother wanted to marry —Yes, I know all about that—I know a good many things—that I was once one of the smartest men smart cavalry regiment; that for one year I was happy a being as ever drew breath, nineteen years and *what* years those nineteen have been! I God? Is there justice in heaven, I ask?" he fiercely, and raising his voice to such a pitch startled sheep stared, and then fled precipitately the hill. "For nineteen years I have suffered death, in the place of one, who holds his head he walks among his fellow men: who is looked who has prospered; who was my enemy was my wife—who swore to ruin me, and ke Thanks to my hot temper, my folly, thanks stantial lying evidence, I escaped the re miracle!"

He paused breathless, and stood gazing at me in silence. Then he went on again in a milder key:

"Sometimes I think you are your mother Ellen; no two people were ever more alike. I cannot realise that you, a young woman of nearly nineteen, are my daughter —my daughter," he repeated in a lower tone.

If he found it difficult to realise that I was his daughter, to me it was almost impossible to believe, that this thin, grey, eager-eyed man, was my father. The impression of eighteen orphan years was struggling hard with the living fact, so unexpectedly presented to me within the last five minutes.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" he asked, after a pause. "Do you not believe me?" he added in a lower tone.

"Yes, of course I believe you," I answered rather scrupulously; "but it has all come upon me so—so suddenly. I will do my best to be a real daughter to you."

"You can do nothing—nothing. What *can* you do returned convict?" he answered bitterly. "Confess, have no relations!"

"I may help to prove your innocence," I faltered.

"You talk like a child! Proofs were too strong against me, and it was twenty years ago."

"You know the fable of the mouse and the lion. I am able to do something, and it certainly won't be out of trying. I shall go and examine the place. I will search for a clue."

"A clue after twenty years!" he echoed, incredulously. "I have searched myself, all but those cabins ing, and that is more than I dare do, with all my and my brogue. There are two things that ver found, the memorandum book and the I firmly believe that that button, was one of leeve links. I remember that night when I met ing upstairs before mess, noticing that his shirt en. He always wore a pair of curious Indian lozenge shape. Next day he had on a pair I before. When one's thoughts are tainted n, these things rankle in the mind!"

"Why you never put this in evidence against quired.

"I—no—I was the culprit; every suspicion fell upo
me. Was it not my gun that shot Sim? Had I n
been out with him alone? Every one believed n
guilty, and Kant, the black-hearted scoundrel, ga
every suspicion a double edge, with whispers, hin
suggestions and pretended regrets. Not a breath
scandal went his way, and yet *he* had more reason
commit the crime than any one. He was drowned
debt; he had lost large sums to Sim, and there
reason—at least I had reason—to suppose, that h
actually forged his name."

"Tell me all about it from first to last," I sai
"Tell me everything, the sooner I know, the sooner
can set to work," I cried with unusual eagerness.

"There is no such immediate hurry, Ellen! A f
days more or less after all these years, don't sign
As for myself, I am now hardened and callous.
heart and soul seem dead. I have lost her. I
lost my name, my youth, my friends, my career
fortune! What could ever give them back to me?
have I left?"

"You have *me*," I said quickly.

"A stranger—a stranger," shaking his head.

"Don't say that father. How can I be a stra
you, when I have my mother's face?"

He covered his face with his hands and g
aloud: "Only for you, Ellen, I would give
struggle; even the chance of bringing him to
but I should like to leave you with a spotless n
see you the wife of some honest gentleman."

"Do not wish that, for I shall never marry,

"All girls say that," he answered, with a sn

"I was very near marriage once, and th
enough."

"But supposing you came across so
some young fellow, who loved you, and
him?"

"There would be a reason, a strong reas

"You would be a fool to let it stand in y
interrupted. "Married to some suitable
young man, under the protection of h
supplied with his money, you could p

ans for my rehabilitation, with every prospect of ccess."

"No one such as you describe, would marry me, owing my history."

"He need not know.—Why should he?"

"Because I should tell him," I declared passionately, rrified at my father's sentiments.

"And as to dipping into his pocket," he continued, if I had not spoken, "all the money would be but rrowed. Do you not know that you are your grand-other's heiress? She cannot leave a penny away from ou, or be sure she would. I am legally dead, you take y place. You will be a very wealthy woman some day. y schemes may seem selfish, but in truth, to leave my ughter a clear name is all I care for now," picking up replacing his cap as he spoke.

Perhaps your name will be cleared sooner than you ," I rejoined with the hopefulness of my age.

e shook his head despondently and said: "Now, , the sun is getting low; look at it sinking in a ball beyond the bog.—It seemed as if it were bathing ry place in a crimson flood.—It is too late for you out alone; come here again if you can at four on Wednesday afternoon. I'll be here. In fact, here on chance every evening this week, till I see ain, and then you shall hear everything—the truth, le truth, and nothing but the truth."

ving my newly found parent helped me carefully low wall, laid his horny hands on my shoulders, ard into my face for some seconds, and finally down and kissed me, then waving me home-h an imperious gesture, he turned, and hurried hill.

ed him—watched him intently—till he became d smaller in the distance, and was finally the furze.

at shabby grey figure be my nearest relation d, Mad Dominick, the stone-breaker, the man, No. 4,724, be my father Philip Lieutenant in the 25th Hussars? I stood le endeavouring to accustom my mind to n feeling the cool dews of night falling on

my thin dress, I too hurried up the hill and over its brow to Billy Park, and was much rallied during the evening on my strange pre-occupation, and unwonted silence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A BLIGHTED LIFE.

"When shall I finish the tale of my years,
Of days in silence and nights in tears?"

On Wednesday at four o'clock, I was true to my trys more than that, I was first at the rendezvous. I s the low wall and watched my father coming up the he had at any rate the step of an active man still did not kiss me, or even shake hands with m joined me, and said peremptorily: "Come ove other side of the churchyard. I cannot tell yo have to say near your mother's grave—not ind she can hear us, but because it killed her. Com side, where we can see the place distinctly," ta arm in a tight grip, and leading me to the furt "Do you see that bit of the Vann, beyond where the light is shining on it? Well, Sim a a mile above that. He must have crossed t the bog that you see—or rather he meant crossed it, but never did so. It is a short c high road. And now sit down here, and I will more time but begin at the very beginning. You mind my lighting my pipe, will you," producing clay one, "a whiff or two soothes me. Only for t I would surely have gone mad in earnest years an ago! I was a Lieutenant in the Cavalry as you an only child and fairly well off. I married you when I was twenty-three. She was by far th girl in these parts, and I cut out a lot of fell carried off Miss O'Brien, among others my f but *why* he could have dreamt of marrying girl without a penny, I never could under was fearfully hard up, and always talking round with an heiress,' besides this, he was grandees, but for all that, there is no doul madly in love with your mother—and she the sight of him. She said that he w

opheles, that he had the evil eye. I believe she refused
im three times. Women have quicker perceptions than
en, I will say that for them, and when I think of the
ndreds of times I fought his battles with her, excused
m, backed him, praised him, I will not tell you what I
el—for I don't want to *frighten* you. In those days,
believed Kant to be a rattling good fellow. He was
y senior by three years. No one would suppose it
w. He was clever in his way; he had a caustic wit
d a good eye for a horse, and played a first rate game
liards. He was as poor as a rat; had no known
ctions, and how he contrived to live in an expensive
nt like ours was a miracle only known to himself.
bled; he betted on races; he bought and sold
nd managed in some marvellous ways to keep
above water, and a good appearance to boot.
always a couple of smart nags, was always well
drank champagne at mess, and had his rooms
uriously furnished than any man in the regiment.
times when cash was very tight, he was com-
borrow, chiefly from me, and I felt rather
han otherwise, like the young 'gaby' that I
loans generally passed out of Kant's mind
r! On some subjects he had a short memory;
vice he had remarked quite casually, 'Oh, I
chap, I must have a grand settling up with you
these days,' and there it would end. He came
house constantly, dined with us a couple of times
, and your mother, poor girl, did her best to like
my friend. Then we had a spell of very high
young cornet, Harold Sim, the son of a soap
d rolling in money, set the fashion. I would
to say the amount of our stakes. Sim had
y luck—the luck that sometimes goes with
ance, and recklessness. Kant lost heavily—
uping himself was a mere question of time.
having been badly hit myself, I put in a
onstrance, as I saw the bets increasing, but
s for my pains, from either Kant or Sim;
is called the 'fever of play' on them, and
h words in return for my advice. So I
together in Sim's room—and left them

in rather a passion. However, my rage soon blew o
and the next day Sim and I went out duck shooting.
was bitterly cold! that fourteenth of January; there
a drizzling icy rain beating in our faces, and we had
sport, only a few flappers. I very foolishly re-ope
the subject of the previous evening, and told Sim th
I were him, I would hold hard: that there was likel
be an awful row sooner or later about such high
that it would give the corps a bad name, and that
few purses were as long as his. At first he cut up ro
but after a little, he told me that he must go on, and
Kant have his *revenge*. 'Poor beggar,' he said, 'I
ashamed to have won so much. He owes me upw
of three thousand. He would double the stakes—
and treble them too. *He* is not afraid of high play

"Kant owes you three thousand pounds!" I s
a tone, no doubt of horrified incredulity. "H
have to sell his commission to pay you."

"'You don't mean that he has not heaps of
said Sim, who was very sharp about money matt
spite of his wealth. 'I thought he was very wel
only waiting for his rents. Why I backed a hea
for him, merely as a matter of form, the day
yesterday.'

"I was sincerely sorry to hear it, but I said
Perhaps my face may have expressed more
wished, for I could see that young Sim was pu
and two together in his own somewhat shrew
and waxing suspicious and uneasy. However,
and wet had penetrated his bones, and findi
was not going to discuss or retail Kant's mo
he said he would land—as only one could ro
and get home across the bog as he was half
in case of a stray shot he took a gun, min
I told him that he had much better leave
it was, for he would have no use for it, an
be home before him. The last I saw
walking in a rather cramped fashion tow
as if his legs were stiff, and as I pulled
river in the punt, he waved his hand, an
thing about 'telling them I was comin
the last I heard or saw of him alive."

Here my father paused for a moment, and puffed at pipe in silence. Then taking out a handkerchief d his forehead slowly, and resumed:

I arrived home first of course, and was rather rised to see nothing of Sim, for I went up to barracks ny way to our house, and left his gun in his room. the stairs, coming down, I met Kant going up, he a fierce, excited look, and seemed in a great to get to his own quarters; passing me he ered: 'Don't keep me, there's a good fellow, I'm ing wet.' Next day no sign of Sim—nor the next, people now began to ask me very odd questions, o look at me rather strangely. I understood it all; eally at times, when the mesh of circumstances was ng itself around me closer and closer every hour, I almost bring myself to imagine, that I had a hand s disappearance. Then the body was found, and rrested, Kant being as virulent and hostile to f he were poor Sim's own brother.

went down (I heard) several times, alone in the orning, and with his own hands carefully searched ce inch by inch for further proofs. You and I, derstand that this was a clever blind; and that in e was seeking anxiously for his sleeve link, and tters, that might betray him, and put him in my

week of the trial was to me a kind of horrid ; the shame of it, was the part that I more keenly than the fear of death after these ears. To see the sea of faces (familiar faces) owards mine, to feel that they all believed me rder—even my own counsel—not to speak mother! Only one was assured of my d declared it in the teeth of the most nce, and with her latest breath. I felt d, and stupified; even her death scarcely were better she were dead, and lying at l side, than to live to be pointed at as lip Deane, who murdered a brother lood, who had robbed him (for a large m was known to have had in his pocket), and who was putting in the rest of

now it's getting late," he said rising. go home before some one comes to sea should like to know what John O'Brien wou knew that you had been holding a rendezvous, w Dominick?"

CHAPTER XIX.

A GIRL'S FREAK.

"We call it only pretty Fanny's way."
—*The Twin R*

AUNT JULIA thought the mock sketching exp bordering on madness, when I first broached it but eventually allowed me to go, though her per was reluctantly accorded, and accompanied by long look of anxious misgiving. The pony was st from work for the occasion, and early one a Mona and I packed ourselves and our paint-b the crazy old croydon, and set out on this (to important and solemn expedition.

"It was just a girl's freak," said Aunt getically—and to a girl who had run away f and matrimony, a little license must be acco sumably I had a wild, unconventional drop and excuses must be made!

The way was long, the pony was old, an friend of the family, we did not hurry or p two hours' time, we had reached the gate short hill to the ruins of Knockbaw Cas work at our sketching-blocks, Mona i being resolved to have something journey. I gave her several hints, w with a somewhat shaky hand, scrawled own block, and telling her that I wou an hour, left her sitting on the short g several inquisitive sheep. I tied "S the gate and left him a bundle of ha being stolen, no more than there was away. Then I walked quickly down had seen Dominick, the stone-br noticed him in passing, and exclai "Look at mad Dominick; what in

of the country. I hope he will *stay*
ent first of all down the lane with high
ither side, then over some green flat pastures,
ne footpath was black—showing the nature of the
derneath—across one or two drains on quaky foot-
, and then we were surrounded by the bog on
ide. On the right it was cut away and in use,
es of turf in clamps, very deep chocolate bog
ull of black water. On the left it was in its
state—a wide desolate range of long brownish
usted here and there with tufts of wild cotton,
h here and there a stretch of heather, a clump of
nd here and there, a solitary long-tailed colt.
were some sportsmen among the heather,
grouse. I heard shots, and presently I saw
coming towards us, with a brace of red setters
heels. How rapidly they walked. My father
uickly behind a large furze bush and I crouched
behind it, as they passed. They were officers
dear, and one of them said, "I thought I saw
bouts a few minutes ago."
her girls out grouse shooting," returned the
ntly; "which way did those birds go? I
u must shoot up; it's past three o'clock and
four brace as yet."
llo, you two," shouted a voice from the
ld on a bit; wait for me," and a very stout,
went puffing after them.
—stop, I have something to tell you.
" panting, "that we are on the ground
ane — you've heard the story — shot

," shouted back a voice, "but hang all
come on—never mind that now."
where they found the body——" he
an to run, and we had heard quite

t forgotten *yet*," said my father, as we
way. "There it is, down there," he
it's quite in a hollow and very lonely."
direction he pointed out, and saw a
readed by a narrow little black foot-

his life, not in her Majesty's uniform, but in con
dress!"

"How long have you been out?" I asked sudden

"Two years. Of course I am under police
veillance, but that is not known. My grey hairs,
goggles, and my trade, are a good shelter. No on
a notion who I really am; they all believe that I
from Cavan, and was shut up there for years
county lunatic asylum. They are a little afraid of
consequence, and leave me to myself."

"I wonder what is the first thing to be done?"
thoughtfully.

"The first thing to be done is, to visit the plac
the four cabins on that part of the bog. Som
may be found still. Another thing, you must kee
own counsel. To no one must you ever mentio
least of all to anyone at Billy Fark. *They* beli
guilty, and after all who could blame them?
must know of your visit to the bog of course,
may suppose that to be a freak of your own
must never guess that you have a wire pulle
background. When the matter is ripe—if ripe
—I will employ a good detective; but we hav
to that yet. I have no clue to put into his
have only one card to play, and that is your
striking likeness to your mother—Kant has n
of your existence—and if suddenly confronted
he might take you for her apparition. He is
extraction—a Levantine—and there are very
of English blood in his veins. He used to b
superstitious, and believed in lucky days, a
omens. I may have occasion to send you w
to him—an errand that may be the hi
hopes. He will think you are a messe
world of spirits—he may be utterly ter
may confess."

"What proofs have you that he did it

"His mysterious absence at the tim
protested that he was walking at th
Drumdear, no one saw him. But a
of a strange man—was seen near
murder by a little boy who went for

a tall man in white. Of course that sounds absurd, ve all knew that Kant had a white waterproof coat. ever, he came home without it, if he did wear it day, and he was never seen to wear it again. Then owed Sim large sums of money, though no). U's." were to be found. I knew this, I alone; nfortunately I mentioned the circumstance to Kant or two after the tragedy, and before suspicion had ngly seized upon *me*. He became the colour of ar ash and denied it flatly, nay furiously, and d that the debt was the *other* way. Ellen! some- that will not be silenced, tells me that he did it at there is surely a Nemesis on his track: leaden- justice will overtake him yet. During all those f solitude I have thought myself nearly stupid, ver every item of the trial, and something than a mere local attachment to a place where the happiest year of my life, has forced me back these roads and lanes—and *that*," nodding he grave.

am I to get there? What excuse have I for he place."

e thought it all out," he answered promptly; w, you paint, I suppose?"

well, within a mile of the cabins, there is the old castle, which say that you are fired with o see and sketch. You take one of your hichever draws and can hold her tongue; you with the croydon and old pony. On the pass *me*, Mad Dominick, at the head of the g to the bog. After you have settled your , you come back and meet me and I will right track, show you all that you ought could do it better? Every week of my that cursed spot."

hall we go?"

if you like."

w. The pony is drawing turnips; but ssible."

hall be on the road, at the other side the turn. You can't miss me—and

path, and, strange to say, over the whole space was spread an extraordinary vivid patch, of red brilliant blood-red flowers; the name is "Venus' looking-glass;" the little flower is common on most bogs; but why should it cover yards and yards in this suggestive spot? I can give no botanical reason for its presence. All I can affirm is, that it was there, making a great suggestive blotch among its somewhat dingy, and brown surroundings.

"The Vann, you see," continued my father, "is barely half a mile off. There are the cabins to the left; we will go to them first. I'll loiter about near these willow trees, whilst you go in and ask for a glass of water. Go into the long house with the byre first: that's where the girl lived, who found the button. If that is no use, try the little one with the windows—and mind you lead the conversation round, to the murder of Mr. Sim."

CHAPTER XX.

PRIVATE ENQUIRIES.

"Attempt the end, and never stand to doubt;
Nothing so hard but search will find it out."

—HERRICK.

I ENTERED the first cabin to which I had been directed, or rather, I looked over the half door into thick smoke, and asked if "anyone was within?"

"There's no one in but Granny," said a tattered child; "mother's away in the town selling fowl."

"Who's there, what's wanted?" enquired a cracked, peevish old voice from the chimney, and for answer I boldly pushed back the bolt and walked in, and showed myself.

There was an ancient hag gathered up on a low three-legged stool, engaged in poking sticks under a pot that hung from the chimney, by a very black and sooty chain, a pot crammed with potatoes and known in Ireland as a "skillett."

"Will you let me come in and rest for a few minutes, and give me a drink of water?" I asked politely.

"Oh, aye, surely Miss, and welcome,' looking up,

stick in hand; "you're a stranger in these parts I am thinking."

"Yes, I am," I admitted, sitting down as I spoke.

"Patsey," said the old woman, addressing the child, "take a clane porringer and run to the well for a sup of water for the young lady. It's dry work, walking Miss; did ye come from far?"

"Yes, a good distance."

"Might I make bold to ask your name? I know most of the gentry around here."

"Miss Le Marchant."

"Miss Le—Mar—faix—I can't round on that name at all, at all, and have ye no other?"

"Ellen—only Ellen."

"Miss Ellen, ye are not the first of that name, in these parts. There was wan of that name wanst I knew well—aye—God rest her soul—she had her own troubles."

"You mean about what happened near this," I said eagerly, seizing on the opening. "Of course *you* know more about it than anyone. Was not some one shot close by many years ago?" I went on timidly.

"Oh! he was shot sure enough, within two hundred yards of where you are sitting, and wasn't it me own daughter heard the moans of him when she was coming home from milking?" she added, with undisguised complacency. "But it's an old story now—so long ago that I almost disremembered it, before you called it up to me."

"I would like to hear it," I said, "especially now I am on the spot, and I am sure no one could tell the story as well as you could," I added with bare-faced flattery.

"It was a grave business!" she said, in a solemn tone. "'Tis not often the quality takes to shootin' one another! Poor young, quiet gentleman, I mind well seeing his body brought up out of the bog hole. He looked as if he had only been put in the day before, and he was there five weeks. There was one black-looking officer, was very earnest about making searches, but he never found anything with all his hunting late and early. Me daughter Mary picked up a button, a brass thing, but she gave it to one of the children, and sure

he went and lost it. Oh! faix that was a rare handsome young gentleman that was tried for his life, the Englishman in the horse soldiers, and many a time I've stood on the road, and watched him riding with Miss O'Brien. They were an elegant couple, him and her. Somehow I had a notion that with all the talk, and work, and trial, and his being sent to Botany Bay and dying there, that may be he was not the man that done it after all!"

I could hardly restrain an exclamation, but I did, by pinching my hands and biting my lips. Was she not going to say anything more? She had become suddenly silent, and sat looking in a dreamy way into the now well-kindled turf fire, as if she saw some far-away object.

"What makes you think that?" I asked at last.

"Oh! we all has our own thoughts and is welcome to them," giving me a sharp glance, "and 'tis no use talking now, when the man is transported, as well as being dead. It would do him no good, and be no relief to him now, and it was only three or four years after we heard a queer thing from Micky Connor—too late to be of any use by the same token."

"And what was that?"

"Here's Patsey and the drink for ye," she answered, as bare-legged Patsey came slowly in, carrying a brimming tin porringer of somewhat muddy water, which I was compelled to taste, wishing Patsey and the beverage—if not at the bottom of the well—at any rate miles away.

"And about Micky?" I said, setting down the mug with a shaking hand.

"Well, Micky was always a rare boy for trouble wan way or another. He was just a heart-scald to his parish priest—not to spake of his parents, what with poaching and snaring, and even worse—he had to keep away from home a good dale, and just at this time he got into worse trouble than ever about a few sheep, and he made off to America, and did not come home for a good bit, but he lands in here one Sunday, and after a while, when we had heard all *his* side of the news, we falls to telling ours, and among other things, about Mr. Sim, and he was in a terrible way when he heard it was young Mr. Deane got into all the trouble, and was dead and Mrs. Deane dead as well—and of a broken heart, they said.

"Well, he ups, and says he—'He no more done it than *I* did—for he was a rale gentleman. Many a time I carried his bag and his gun, and he gives me half-a-crown. It was that there black faced Scutt, that used to shoot with him, and never could look ye in the face, nor part with his money. I met *him.* I remember it well, and have every raisen to, for it was an evening I was hiding on account of a bit of talk about Sam Doollan's hoggits. I was lying behind a bank in the boreen and he passed down. He wore a white coat. The evening was moist. About a quarter of an hour after, I heard a shot, but I never misdoubted but it was someone discharging his gun before going home, and a while after that this gentleman passed. I heard him coming—running this time, and I lay as flat as a toad. He had no white coat on I noted, and his collar was all up about his face, but it was the same man, I'm ready to take my dying oath,' says he, very detarmined."

"And where is this man *now?*" I asked faintly.

"Faix, Miss, where he can do no harm, and no good to any one. He is dead this ten years; and I believe he was right, for a while afther, whin my eldest son Jim was cutting down the wattles and bushes in a fence that borders the bog road, he found something."

"What was it?" I gasped with dry lips.

"Well, I don't know that I could exactly tell you *that*, Miss dear. It would be of no use now; the parties is dead and would only lade to trouble and annoyance, and have the polis coming round, and maybe—things is so contrairy—they would be making out that Jim had a hand in it! Any way he has it hid away safe, and he is very cautious with regard to it. Indeed for all I know he has made away with it, for it was not a safe keepsake for anyone to have."

"It wasn't a gun, was it?" I ventured timidly.

"No—it wasn't *that*. You take a terrible interest in it I see! Young people does be curious, specially young girls, but we can't be telling you *too* much," she concluded facetiously.

"It is time for me to be going on now," I said, rising after a long pause, my knees actually trembling under me.

"Oh! ye can't be going out of this like that! The

praties is done. There's nothing else, but a sup of new butter-milk, but you are kindly welcome, Miss, if you will just sit down again."

"I am not at all hungry. Thank you very much for your hospitality. I am over sketching at the castle," I said, slipping a half-crown into her lap. "Maybe next time I come this way you will tell me the rest of that interesting story, and what it was that your son found." I tried to speak in an off-hand way, but I felt quite hysterical and ready to burst out either laughing or crying in her face.

"Well," she answered slowly, "you beat all for curiosity. I will say *that*," fingering the half-crown affectionately.

"You see you told me so much, and have left off like a story in a magazine, just at the most interesting part."

"Well, well, Alannah, may be we will see about it another day! I was an old fool to rake up the business at all, at all," shaking her head irritably.

It was evident that there was no more to be told on this occasion, and no use in waiting, so I said good-bye from the half-door, and began to pick my way across the muddy yard, if yard it could be called.

"Come back avick," she screamed, "come here. I've one word more to whisper to you. See here, honey," lowering her voice, as I hurried up to her. "Are you so mortal anxious to hear what he found?"

"I am—I am, of course," I answered breathlessly.

"You will have some *raisin* for it, see?" winking with incredible wickedness.

"I won't deny it—I have," I answered boldly.

"Nothing for nothing is no gain to anyone," she remarked. "See here now—I know where it is—what would you give for a sight of it. Come now, there's a chance for you, Miss, dear?"

"I'll give you whatever I can."

"Would ten shillings——"

"A pound, and a pound of tobacco, if you will give it to me," I exclaimed, in uncontrollable eagerness.

"GIVE it to you!" said the old lady fox in a tone of triumph. "You're concerned in the murder. You're a *she* polisman in petticoats. There's no throwing dust

in my eyes, old and blear as they look. *Who* are ye?" she asked fiercely, her knotted old hands quivering on the top of the half-door. "Out with it now—*who* are ye?"

"You will not tell me your secret—why should I tell mine," I said doggedly.

"It seems to me that mine is worth the most of the two," she replied, nodding her head.

"I will tell you who I am," I said impulsively, "if you will promise on your word to keep it to yourself, promise faithfully—swear to me."

"Oh aye, I can promise all that; no need to swear."

"I am Philip Deane's daughter," I whispered.

"Oh, by me oath! Oh Wirra! Wirra! what's *this* ye are telling me," suddenly stepping out of the house, and casting up her hands dramatically.

"The plain truth—I am Mr. O'Brien's niece. I live at Billy Park. You have seen my mother," taking off my hat. "Is my face like hers?"

"'Tis the very moral of it, and there's no denying it. 'Tis Ellen O'Brien come to life. Sure I might have known your eyes. Do you want to clear him?"

"Of course I do," I answered eagerly.

"And what will you give for it, Miss, dear. How far will you go?"

"I'm very, very poor. As poor as yourself. If I can scrape up five pounds, will that do?"

"Five pounds now, a pound at Christmas, some baccy and a pound of tay, and a lock of sugar," returned the old dame, who knew how to drive a bargain—"you will go as far as that, and may be a flannel petticoat?"

"Yes."

"Well then, come back on Saturday at this hour and you'll get it—but mind, if Jim finds out, he'll destroy me!"

"No, why should he. Would he not clear the innocent and punish the guilty?" I asked indignantly.

"Oh, it's an old story now ye see, and no one cares, barrin' yourself. Anyhow there's no doubt but I'll have to tell the hoight of meeself in lies, to keep him aisy. Well Miss, dear, good day to you. I'll expect you on Saturday, without fail, and you'll mind the tay and sugar

and baccy. I'll not keep you no longer, and Jim will be coming home to his tay (more betoken it's butter-milk) you'd better be going, for if he sees you, he might suspicion us, and be asking questions that were inconvanient! Lady callers doesn't often trouble *these* parts."

CHAPTER XXI.

SUCCESS AND HOW I WON IT.

"The thread is spun,
The prize is won,
The work is done."

—SOUTHEY.

ON the whole, I had been surprisingly successful, and my father was astonished to find that I had so promptly, as it were, got to the very root of the matter. As we retraced our steps over the bog, and along the lane, his hopes ran high and his words flowed fast. In two respects he resembled his mother: he had her deep-sunk piercing dark eyes, and he was inclined to be imperious. *I* was to be the tool, the puppet, and nothing more. I was to do exactly as he bade me, and not use my own discretion in any way. I thought this a little hard, but submitted cheerfully. His long and dreadful experience had warped his temper, and things must be said and done, exactly as *he* would have them said and done—or not at all. Now that we had got upon the trail, he was more eager about justice than ever. He did not now say that "It was solely for *my* sake;" that he and I were to spend our very lives in clearing the name of Deane. No, he talked of the satisfaction of punishing that arch traitor Kant, who had not only murdered Sim, but also (as surely as if he had shot her, though more indirectly) my mother. He was already quite feverishly animated, and fluent in speech at the mere idea, that within three days more, if I was cautious, the end of the clue—the thing, whatever it was, that had been found—would be in his hand.

"Now I'll leave you," he said, as we came within sight of the castle. "I'll be here again on Saturday, but before I leave you, Ellen, you must make me a solemn promise with your hand in mine," taking it,

"that no other human being shall share our secret. If a whisper of this gets abroad, there is an end of everything."

"I can promise all that; I can keep a secret."

"And you will never reveal who I am, or in what relation I stand to you, even to your husband."

"I may easily agree to that, for as I have already told you I shall never marry."

"Yes you will, and why not? If I was a felon in reality, I could understand your scruples, but you now know as well as I do myself, that I am as innocent as *you* are. I shall be cleared yet. Meanwhile, why punish yourself, if happiness holds you out a hand? (it's many a year since I saw her). Don't be a Quixotic little goose, but take it—seize it."

"You forget that once it is known *who* I am—as Mr. Bellamy was polite enough to tell me, very few would care, or dare, to marry me."

"Then whoever does, marries you for yourself. You have the power of testing your lover to the utmost; if he stands the strain, marry him, and now good-bye. You'll find me loitering on the bog on Saturday, but not on the road; it might raise suspicion. Start early, whatever you do, and catch the old hag *alone*."

Of course Mona knew where I had been, and examined and cross-examined me with an awe-struck countenance. I told her but little, as we trotted homewards in the dusk; Aunt Julia and Mona were equally curious—as it was perfectly natural that they should be. I drew a vague blurred sketch of my visit, of the old hag, of the drink of boggy water. I did not allude to Micky's confession, or Jim's discovery, but I stated plainly, the amazing news that I was bound for the same part of the country on Saturday, and that, as far as I could judge, it was for positively the last time. Once more Smith, the pony, had a holiday from the turnip field, once more Mona sat and sketched Knockbaw, and once more I visited the long cabin with the byre. I arrived early, so that there would be no fear of being interrupted by Jim, who would not be due for his "tay" for a full hour. I laid my parcels on an outer sill of a window—which was stuffed with an ancient hat,

and a beehive—and rapped on the half-door with an unsteady hand.

"So you are back, are you?" the old woman called out in her cracked brogue.

"You are one of the persevering wans! Well, come in, come in, there's no wan in it but myself. I sent Patsey out, and me daughter is on the bog. You brought the money?"

(I had; it had been provided by my father, who assured me that he was not *quite* as poor as he looked).

"Yes, I had brought the money," I told her; "also tea and sugar and tobacco, and she should have them in good time;" but I was not going to give them first, I said to myself. No, no; and if ever greed and avarice peered out of a pair of faded old grey eyes, they peered out of her's.

"Is it gold or bank-notes?" she enquired anxiously.

"Gold."

"So best; then that will do. He has it hid up in the loft," casting a very fretful glance at the ladder that led up to some dark mysterious region in the roof.

"Can I go," I said. "I'll get it, if you will tell me where it is."

"No, no, Miss dear, that would never answer. But oh! my poor old bones," she groaned; "oh holy Mary, it's worse nor a penance; 'tis ten years since they were axed to do such a thing as climb up to the loft. However five yellow sovereigns is a golden cure for stiffness," she added; and seizing the ladder, which was perpendicular, began to crawl up; but it was worse than she expected, or she was stiffer in the joints; for when she had gone up about four rungs, she paused, and exclaimed, "I can't do it! it's no use; you'll have to go yourself," she said descending very, very slowly.

"Where is it?" I enquired.

"Somewhere in the thatch. "It's a good big parcel, and you can't miss it. It will be at the far side, the back of the house, up you go. You are young and souple, and don't be long."

I needed no second bidding. I went up like a lamplighter, crawled through a square hole at the top, and found myself in semi-darkness. It was half roof, half

garret. There was a low bed, with a cotton patchwork quilt. The floor was covered with onions and apples (lately stored), a pane of glass let into the thatch, gave all the light there was, but my eyes soon became accustomed to the gloom. I made out creels, baskets, a scythe, and a horse collar, I was in the family spare room and store room combined, but I had no time to waste in staring about. I must begin at once, to search the thatch.

As I was about to commence operations, I heard steps in the yard, and then a man's gruff voice in the kitchen.

"Bad luck to me for forgetting!" he said. "Here have I been, and left the big creel afther me."

I cast an anxious eye around, and beheld the very identical article within two yards of me.

Horror! what was I to do, if this man came up and found me! Would there be a second murder on the bog? I looked about in a kind of frenzy.

There was not a nook or cranny, in which one could hide a cat, not even under the bed, for it was a low one, and within a few inches of the floor. What *was* I to do?

I stood and trembled like the traditional aspen leaf, expecting that the next thing I would hear, would be his foot upon the ladder, and of course *he* was "Jim." But to my unutterable relief, his mendacious old parent came gallantly to the rescue, with a presence of mind that hinted at *years* of hypocrisy.

"And is it the big turf creel you mane? Why, and sure, and didn't Jim Blake come and borrow it 'ere last night?"

"Then bad scran to Jim Blake. He is always borrowing," said her son angrily; "and now I suppose I'll have to tramp down there and fetch it, and lose half me day's work.—May the devil fly away with you for lending it at all. If he'd come and borrow *you*——"

"Whist now, Alannah, be aisy! I hear me brother John is sending me home a couple of pounds. Ye would not like Jim Blake to have the fingering of them would ye now?"

"How do ye know?" he asked in a tone of profound amazement.

"Mary at the Cross had a letter, and there was an order in it for me."

"An' how much?" he enquired in a milder key.

"Well, since ye *must* know, three pounds and devil a lie in it."

"Then, I'll have that heifer calf of Conolly's as sure I'm a living man! I'll go and spake with him this evening. You are sartin of the coin?"

"Sure and sartin. I wish I was as sure of dying in glory."

"Oh, then I'll make sure of the calf, and now I have to tramp after that creel," which he did, muttering loud anathemas, as he swung the door behind him.

"I say, Missy, Missy!" the old woman called up. "Did you ever know the likes of that for contrariness! Throw down the creel till I hide it in the turf house, and I'll swear black and blue 'twas there all the time. Hurry, hurry."

No need to tell me to hurry, between the fear of Jim's return, and my eagerness to find the hidden parcel, and the fact of being half-suffocated up among the smoky rafters and the smoky thatch, I was very quick indeed. I felt about, I tore out handfuls of thatch. I searched, and I researched, and blackened my hands, and for a long time found nothing.

"Try near the chimney," she called up in a scream, and I tried accordingly; and at last felt paper, then a big lump of something, and after several minutes' desperate rooting and scratching, I, as it were, dug out of the thatch a packet, *the* parcel, and without waiting to open it, hurried headlong down the ladder.

My hands, yes and my face, were like a chimney-sweep's, and needed a scrubbing at once. I washed them hastily in a yellow crock, whilst the old woman did what I would have preferred doing myself. She opened the parcel, gnawing the string with her well-worn teeth, and then very deliberately shook out a crumpled white waterproof coat!

* * * * *

"There was a lot av blood all over the front and down the sleeves, but I washed it out, and there is this, in the pocket—a tobacco pouch empty, and a pocket-book full.

No money, though," she added, right freely opening it and diving her claw-like fingers into every division. "Nothing but papers and figures, and the like. No good at all," scornfully.

"It belonged to the murdered man," I faltered. "That is the lost memorandum-book that was missing at the time. Strange, that it should be found in the pocket of Mr. Kant's coat;" and I stretched out my hand and seized it greedily, and rapidly turned over the stained and yellow leaves.

Yes, the bets and winnings were all down, in a large bold writing, as if entered with infinite gusto and satisfaction.

"Won from Kant, November 19th, £250. Won from Kant, November 27th, £90," &c., &c., and in the pocket at the end of the book, that told such a fearful tale, there were a number of Mr. Kant's notes-of-hand, stuffed in, one for no less a sum than five hundred pounds, and the date, January the 13th, the day before the murder.

However, I had no time to examine all the contents of the pocket-book now. I shut it up, and put it in the bosom of my dress, and reaching for the tobacco pouch and coat, folded up the latter into a neat parcel. I then produced my purse, and paid into the old crone's withered shaking hand, the promised five sovereigns.

How her eyes gleamed! Had she ever in all her well nigh eighty years held so much money in her eager palm?

"It's the price of his life, I'm thinking," she said, looking at me steadily.

"I should not wonder if it was," I answered gravely.

"Aye, dearie me, but you have a great sperrit for a young girl. You'd hang him. I see it in your eye."

"He deserves to be hanged if ever a man did," I rejoined sternly. "Look at what my father and mother have suffered. He can have no conscience, no pity, no remorse, no——"

"And the tay and sugar and backey?" she interrupted querulously.

"They are outside. I'll fetch them in a moment. They are in the window. Here they are," placing them

in her apron. "And now I must be off. I have a long way to go. You will be sure and keep my secret, and never tell any one, that you sold me *this*," indicating my precious parcel.

"Aye, honey, and ye got it too chape altogether! You heard the string of lies I had to tell. I wonder the ground didn't crack under me! and now I've to give up no less than three pounds for Connolly's calf, we never reckoned on *that*, ye know, and that only laves me two; and I'll have to square Mary at the Cross, not to spake of how I'm ever to face down Jim about the turf creel; and if he finds out the coat is gone, what will I do at all, at all?"

"Say the rats took it," I suggested. "I wonder they did not."

"'Deed and if I tould him that Miss dear, he'd *smell* a rat; he knows there's not wan in the place, Miss O'Brien, darlin, I mane — Miss— Ellen — Marching — wouldn't ye try in your pocket, and see if you haven't another goold sovereign about you, for the poor old woman that put you on the track, and has to run the risk of her life—not to spake of the peril of her soul—with regard to all the lies she has told for you?"

I *had* another sovereign as it happened, aye, and a one-pound note too, and I could not resist this pitiful appeal, and handed over the coin.

"You may as well give me the note, when you are about it," said this rapacious old creature. "It will help to bury me."

And I gave it also. I believe she would have had everything there was in my purse, if it had been twenty guineas, but it was now empty.

"Mind, you keep my secret," I said to her across the half-door.

"Is it keep it?" in a tone of shrill decision. "Why it's as much as my life would be worth, to breathe it, after the hand I've had in it myself. I suppose you wouldn't wait for a cup of tay—your *own* tay, Miss dear?"

Needless to say I would not. I was in far too great haste to be gone.

"Well, good bye me lady. I might have suspicioned

from the first that ye wor an O'Brien. Oh, there's the fine old *rale* gintry! I could expatiate to you for hours——"

I was not going to allow her to do anything of the sort; hours indeed! when minutes were precious, so with a valedictory wave of my hand, I bade her farewell, and fled across the yard. I had executed my commission, I had found the clue, and I hoped never again to set eyes on that long brown cabin, with its mean little windows, nor the mournful monotonous bog, with its wild stretches of tangled, matted brown, grass—its suggestive crimson flowers—and holes of inky water. As I threaded my way, between some little black peat stacks, and great thorny furze bushes, I saw my father coming to meet me, and I never stopped running, till I had placed my treasure trove in his hands.

"I cannot see to read," he said tremulously, after a long and eloquent silence, "but I can swear to this coat, and to the book and tobacco pouch. I gave it to Kant, and in the daylight, his initials are written inside it. I put them there myself. That," holding it out, "is alone enough to hang him. It proves that this is his coat. You are a good girl Ellen. I don't know where you got all your nerve from—not from your mother!"

"I suppose you will search for Mr. Kant now," I said. "Have you any idea of where he is to be found?"

"Colonel Kant, you mean. He is a noble example of a wicked man who flourishes like a green bay tree. He left the Hussars, and went on half pay. Somehow the Hussars were never very enthusiastic about Kant. He is now in a line regiment, second-in-command. What a sensation it will make in the fashionable world, when a colonel is arrested for murder, and still greater sensation when he is hanged by the neck till he is dead! But *his* sufferings, if the hangman knows his business, will only last for a minute or two. Mine have endured for *years*. I am going to try and set the machinery of the law to work. Yes, I, a ticket-of-leave, a lifer"—with a strange hoarse laugh. "I have little money and no friends, and if I fail with Scotland Yard, if no one will take up my case, I shall play my last card and strike him through you, Nellie. I shall never forget the day I saved you from the mad dog, nor what I felt when you turned and

looked me in the face. I thought it was your *mother* come to life. Kant will think the same. You little dreamt *who* I was, when I walked home beside you? Well, we must part now, and for a long time. I am going over to England with this," hugging the coat. "If you wish to write to me and have anything particular to say, a letter to Dominick Kelly, Post Office, Drumdear, will always reach me. Good-bye, take care of yourself," and he wrung my hand painfully, and trudged away.

CHAPTER XXII.

OUR NEIGHBOURS.

"Shut, shut the door, good John! fatigued I said:
Tie up the knocker, say I'm sick, I'm dead."

—POPE.

"WELL?" exclaimed Mona as I clambered into the croydon beside her. "Well?" What a pregnant word that was. I recognised it at once as the forerunner of dozens of eager questions, to which I could give *no* answer.

For if I confessed that I had discovered the long lost coat and pocket book, she would naturally enquire, "What had I done with them?" and if I told her that I had presented them to Mad Dominick, she would undoubtedly insist upon hearing my reasons for such an outrageous proceeding.

"I can tell you nothing," I replied at last, in a very piano voice.

"What! After paying two long vists to old Mrs. Duffy! After the hours I've sat wasting paints, do you mean to say you are no wiser than ever?" she demanded rather indignantly.

"I am wiser than I was. I have found out something, but oh, Mona, like a dear good girl, don't ask me what it is. I cannot tell you now, bnt I will some day. I will indeed."

As we drove along briskly between miles of dusky hedges, for twilight had fallen, I besought her eagerly, besought her with tears, not merely to ask me no questions, but to shield me from aunt Julia's anxious enquiries, and

Posie's searching cross-examination. Posie was so sharp, if she thought I had made a discovery and was keeping it from her, she would be full of blunt queries, surmises, guesses, and suspicions, I would never have a moment's peace. She would be always figuratively lying in wait, to pounce upon me unawares, or laying cruel conversational pitfalls, to trip me up. Mona was as curious as most people, and to have certain expectations dangled before her eyes, and then withdrawn without any explanation, was a severe strain upon her good temper; but in the end she agreed to keep my secret implicitly.

"It's rather funny, and surely very *Irish*," she said, "to ask me to keep a secret that I don't know. However I will manage Posie; but I think, Nellie, you had better say a word to mother yourself."

"What have you to tell me, child?" said Aunt Julia, sitting up erect, as I entered her room, and speaking with the eagerness of a woman to whom any news is very rare, and good news, almost unknown.

"Nothing," I answered in a low voice and a mental reservation, "nothing that I could divulge."

"Nothing! Ah, I thought so, my dear. I feared that you would find your expedition of no use. You see it all happened so long ago. It was utterly hopeless. I suppose you saw that dreadful old woman again?"

"Yes, I saw her."

"I hope she will never tell anyone that you have been to visit her, dear; there is no use in jogging people's memories about unpleasant subjects. It has been a trying day for you. I see you are tired and depressed. Well at any rate you have done your best, dearie. You can do no more, and I must say you have wonderful nerve, first running away from Mr. Bellamy, and now searching those awful cabins. You are not like any O'Brien that I ever saw. You must take after your great grand-aunt Janette, who followed the hounds in a scarlet jacket, and horsewhipped a man who kissed her."

"Oh, Aunt Julia!" I expostulated with an hysterical laugh, "I am not like *her*, I loathe riding. The riding master said I was hopeless—like a jelly in the saddle."

"What I mean is, that you have your Aunt Janette's spirit, Nellie, and now, my dear girl, I am sure you will be glad of your tea." Tea was Aunt Julia's favourite remedy for nearly all the ills that human flesh is heir to—a stimulant—a restorative, a sedative, and it was of course prescribed for me now.

"And so you had a fine wild goose chase!" said Posie, as I took my place at the table—Posie had evidently been well schooled.

"After taking the pony from the turnips for two days—mind you cannot have him *again* for ages."

"I don't want him," I retorted snappishly.

"Then you have paid your last visit, and left your P. P. C. cards on old Mrs. Duffy.

"Posie I wonder you can joke on the subject," I returned indignantly. "I hope for my own part, that I shall never set eyes on her, or that horrible place again."

"Ah, well I must say, that *I* never could understand why you ever wished to see it at *all*. You could not do any good. You have only worried yourself for nothing. It is twenty years since it all happened, and bye gones are bye-gones." Thus briefly did Posie sum up the case.

And the laming of Smith, the pony, and consequent arrears in turnip drawing, were to all appearances the only result, of my whimsical trip to Knockbaw bog.

* * * * *

Early autumn, with its accompanying grouse and blackberries, gave place to early winter, with its nuts and snipe; storms of yellow leaves whirled and capered round the walls of Billy Park; a faint aroma of their decay was in the air, which had also a strong touch of frost, and leaden skies hung over the low lands, from which a faint white mist ascended at sundown, and the roads were muddy, the hedges were bare, luckily our turf fires were big, for winter was upon us—winter that drove us all indoors at four o'clock, and assembled us round one blazing centre of attraction.

It was too soon to light the lamps, and we talked in the dusk, and listened to uncle's anecdotes, and auntie's long stories. In the evenings we played whist, worked

industriously for Rose MacCarthy, while some one read aloud. Then we had cheerful letters from abroad from Brian and Tom, which were also public property. On the whole, although our lives were monotonous, they were occupied, and if our days were short, they were happy. Moreover, uncle's affairs having come to the proverbial worst, began to mend. One of the old grand-aunts, a most clamorous, pressing annuitant, was dead, and her income reverted to her sorely harassed nephew. She did not leave him a penny out of all her hoards, and she was as rich as she was miserly. With her, the ruling passion had been strong in death, for when her younger sister, who had also been at death's door, recovered so far as to totter in to see her, she exclaimed fretfully:

"Dear, dear, Arabella! they said that you were very bad, and I was in hopes that the one funeral expense would have done for us both."

Unfortunately for uncle, her sisterly wish was not fulfilled, and Miss Arabella lingered on for years to draw comfortable quarterly payments. Now that there was a little ready money in the family purse, uncle pulled its strings and gave us each a new dress, subscribed to a circulating library for us and to a daily paper for himself. We were enabled to cover all the faded drawing-room chairs and sofas with fresh chintz—to drape the windows with inexpensive curtains, and to fill up the great voids caused by the sale of the grand piano, Buhl cabinets and statues and pictures—with home made, but effective, shelves and dressers, covered with hereditary old china, that we had not *dared* to sell. We beautified the drawing-room for our own benefit entirely, for visitors at Billy Park were almost as rare as a turf cart in Regent Street, and we did not take any share in county gaieties. The list of meets of the hounds came regularly enough to uncle, and he perused them mournfully, and placed them in the chimney piece in the dining-room with a sigh. He had been a celebrated rider in his day. Now his only mount was a broken-winded pony.

Invitations to county balls were occasionally sent to "Mr., Mrs. and the Misses O'Brien"; and once or

twice Aunt Julia insisted on their acceptance. "Why should not her girls go and enjoy themselves for once like other girls?" She was so tearfully persistent, that they went, chaperoned by poor Uncle John, and now, oh! what days of sewing and toiling and planning before Mona and Posie were fit to be displayed and criticised in Aunt Julia's room, and subsequently packed into the cover car, and whirled away to happiness? They did not enjoy themselves: this much they confided to me. They had but few partners —chiefly old gentlemen. The O'Briens had fallen from their high estate, and were now almost as much forgotten as the tombs of their ancestors! In their own immediate nighbourhood they had hardly any acquaintances. Of two large places near them, one had been closed by death, and the other by poverty; their dismal avenues were grass grown; their plantations were given over to young cattle, and their habitations, to the owl and the bat. Our society was confined to the parson and his wife, the family doctor, and an old maiden lady. The doctor was a plausible gentleman, who came to see auntie as a matter of form; told her all the latest gossip, and carefully fingered his one pound note, to see that the *shilling* was duly within. Miss Anne O'Toole was the very last sprig of an ancient family, and lived in great (but genteel) poverty over a chandler's shop in Ballymacarrot. She was upwards of seventy, but as erect as a crutch, and equally gaunt and thin. Her clothes were more curious than costly, being extremely old fashioned, not to say threadbare. She wore short petticoats and thick brogues, and was a most notable pedestrian. She walked out to Billy Park every other Monday, indifferent to hail or heat, and spent a long (and I trust happy) day in Aunt Julia's dressing-room. We always contrived to have an extra dish or two on these occasions, and to give her large helpings. Poor lady! it was not alone the walk that made her appetite so keen, nor was it age that made her look so gaunt. I believe that excepting on what she called "her rounds" among old friends, she never tasted meat, from one year's end to the other. If she was poor, she was also proud. She owed no one a penny; she would be beholden to none. Her face

was a study in cast iron, when blundering, well-meaning Posie, once offered to send her in "a pair of fowls and a dozen of eggs because we could easily spare them."

"No, no, my child," she said, after an awful silence, "I've not come to the Parish *yet*. I don't want outdoor relief. Aye the days have been when I have come to this very house with my mother, in a chariot, with outriders, and Mrs. Smith, the lawyer's wife to thrust her wretched little phaeton down my throat, *me* that was born and reared in a carriage! Ah, well, I've enough for all I want. I've enough to keep me alive, and, when it's the Lord's will to take me, to bury me decently—what more does an old woman require?"

Miss Anne and Aunt Julia spent together many hours of delightful retrospection, "tea and old times," as we called it, and they were both very eloquent about "interlopers" and tradespeople who were trying to push their way into what had once been, a most exclusive circle—the county society that encompassed the towns of Ballymacarrot and Drumdear.

"I give it to them all," proclaimed Miss Anne triumphantly, "though I believe they call me a mad old beggar woman, me whose ancestors were Kings of Ireland! Mrs. Mould, a most brazen woman, was boasting before a roomful of people the other day of her money, of course; for the poor creature has nothing else. Her husband has just bought a pair of horses from some Lord, and given three hundred pounds for them. 'Money is the great thing now, is not it Miss O'Toole,' she said staring at me. 'It can buy everything.'

"'I believe it can; everything but one article, ma'am,' I said, 'and that I know ye would be thankful to purchase at *any* price—a little blue blood.' There was a grin all round the room," concluded Miss Anne, "for her father was a fishmonger."

"You were very severe, Miss Anne," said Aunt Julia, delightedly. "I did not think you could say such things."

"Ah, you don't know me, when my temper is put up, by those—that me poor mother would have had the hall swept after, if she was alive. I went last week to call at Cornahinch, I used to be great there, with the old

people, and although it's six good miles out of Ballymacarrot I thought I would go and see Brian Clancy's young wife, and sure many a day I nursed Brian when he was a baby: well I walked up to the house; it was raining at the time, and I saw the new lady peeping out of the parlour window, and then she drew back very sharp. I rang and knocked for a long time, until a pert looking servant girl came to the door, and I asked if her mistress was at home, and was just about to wipe my feet upon the mat.

"'No,' she says, well schooled, 'she's out paying calls in Drumdear.'

"At first I was speechless, to hear such a shocking falsehood coming so glib from that young girl, and then I turned about and said to her:

"'Give my compliments to Mrs. Clancy and tell her, the next time she goes visiting, to *take her face with her.*' What do you say to that Julia, and was *that* too severe?" I believe that a good many people stood in awe of Anne O'Toole's tongue, for she spoke her mind quite freely, but she was always very agreeable, nay affectionate to us. We mended her poor old gloves and mantle, on the sly. Indeed I actually dared to line the latter with red flannel. I do not know why she suspected *me*, but she did, for on her next visit she said, "You thought I would not notice it. Eh? I notice more than you think;" but instead of being ferocious, as she had been about the chickens, she pinched my cheek, and said, "You remind me of your mother in some ways. She was a darling creature; you'll never be that, but you are a good kind girl, and your face is like her's, only a bad copy." Our nearest neighbours, were the Reverend Cornelius Shine and his wife, but indeed it might almost have been the Reverend Mrs. Shine, and her husband, for he was of very secondary importance; they lived just outside the west entrance, and although we only saw our pastor on Sundays, we had the pleasure of beholding Mrs. Shine every day in the week. She was a short, stout, elderly lady, with a kind heart, an immense fund of spare energy, and a voluble tongue. Her two daughters were married to missionaries, and she had but little to occupy her at home, so she

made the affairs of the whole parish her own, especially the affairs of Billy Park. She knew everything that went on in her immediate neighbourhood, and did not disdain to hear particulars of the death of Biddy Duff's goat, nor the full details of the breaking off of the match between Pat Regan and Peggy Doolan, all about a chest of drawers, that ought to have been in Peggy's portion.

Although idle, meddling, gossiping, and arbitrary, she had her good points. She was very fond of the O'Briens and excessively anxious "to see the girls settled." They had no secrets from her, and she entered with spirit into that farce upstairs, and played her part with zeal and prudence. She procured "orders" for the work of "poor Irish ladies" from wealthy English friends, and disposed of Mona's flounces, and Posie's handkerchiefs, but (strange contradiction) fought and bargained penny by penny as rigorously as Rose Macarthy herself. It was whispered to me, that in one desperate financial crisis, when uncle was from home, and auntie's claret and coals were at their lowest ebb, "she had lent a little money," and I must say here, though I never hinted it to Mona or Posie, that I think she took many liberties, and presumed beyond sufferance, on the strength of this loan. Mrs. Shine knew everything that had occurred in the diocese for the last thirty years; she was a kind of calendar, or animated book of reference, and remorselessly raked up forgotten episodes, family scandals and family skeletons that had long been buried in decent oblivion. She knew the *age* of every lady in the county, to a day, and of course she knew all about *me*. Indeed she was far better posted in my affairs than I was myself. I am sorry to say that she invariably treated me with an air of cool condescension, or galling forgiveness, as if I had been guilty of some mysterious crime, that she and I alone knew all about, and that as a favour to me, on condition of my good behaviour, the secret should go no further. The Rectory was the only house I ever visited. I shrank from meeting strangers, and indeed beyond the limits of our small circle, my existence was unknown. The O'Briens' large circle of friends had almost dwindled down to the Shines and Miss O'Toole,

for it was apparent that they were in financial difficulties, that Mrs. O'Brien was a hopeless invalid—and really Billy Park was so dreadfully out of the way! In prosperous times Uncle John had always called on the Colonel and officers of whatever regiment was stationed in Drumdear; but as he had no longer any shooting or hospitality to offer, it was many years since he had entered the barracks, nor was Mr. John O'Brien's card, ever now to be seen over an ante-room chimney-piece. In fact, since the business about his brother-in-law, John O'Brien had given military men a very wide berth. Did not they all know that his sister's husband—an officer—had murdered another officer? He had no desire to encounter any more soldiers.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MRS. SHINE'S PREPARATIONS.

"Like Cato gave his little senate laws,
And sit attentive to his own applause."

—POPE.

ONCE a year in summer time, when the strawberries were ripe, it was the custom of Mrs. Shine to give what she was pleased to call a garden-party, but which was usually held *indoors*, owing to the capricious nature of the Irish climate. This sole annual entertainment was intended as a thank-offering and return for the various good dinners, heavy luncheons, and musical treats, to which the Reverend and Mrs. Shine had been bidden by their friends. The Shines had not dropped into oblivion like the O'Briens; far from it! Mrs. Shine kept herself and her spouse prominently before the local public, and the woman who forgot, or omitted, to invite her to Christmas tree, dinner, christening, wedding breakfast, or bazaar, had only *herself* to thank, for ensuing disagreeable disclosures about her ancestors, her servants, and her own, and her husband's, peculiarities.

But to return to the garden party. Great efforts were made, and extraordinary preparations set on foot, at least ten days before the event came off. Writing out invitations, was a long and serious business. Then there was cake-making, the washing of the best Spode china, the

putting up of clean curtains, the tuning of the piano, the mowing of the lawn, the raking of the avenue, and such like unusual undertakings, and attractions. Billy Park was indented upon, for assistance, and came forward handsomely, with multitudes of tea spoons, old silver bowls, teapots, salvers, and cake-baskets, and for two days previous to *the* day, Mona and I, had been down at the Rectory helping with all our might. Mrs. Shine "left everything to us," with many flattering expressions of her entire confidence in our taste, which meant, that *we* had all the labour of arranging, and re-arranging her shabby dingy drawing-room, of gathering flowers and grasses, washing glass, whipping cream, and laying out the tea-table, whilst *she* reposed on a sofa in her own room, calmly reading the daily paper, or an evangelical novel, knowing in her idle old mind, that she would receive with beaming and complacent smiles, the due praise of our labours in her own person.

The invitation to me—when the festival was first mooted—had been somewhat half-hearted, and was worded in this fashion:

"Miss Le Marchant—I suppose *you* would not care about coming, as you know no one—of course if you would, I shall be glad to see you."

Naturally I repudiated any wish to be her guest—perhaps a little shortly. Mrs. Shine's fête would be a very trumpery affair, after those I had witnessed in London, and Mrs. Shine was very well pleased at my refusal. She informed Posie (who never could keep anything to herself) that I was a rather remarkable-looking girl, and lots of people would be sure to ask who I was? *Who* I was? I sometimes seemed to forget this fact myself; for the last year I had had no communication with Dominick Kelly. He had not written a line to me since we had parted near Knockbaw Castle. I could almost bring myself to believe, that my search, and discovery was all a dream. My quiet, uneventful life tended to this delusion, and it seemed much more natural and credible, that Uncle John was my father, than that strange, stern-faced wanderer, whom I had only seen five times. Mrs. Shine's disinclination for my company had been suddenly changed into a most

ardent craving for my presence. She had been disappointed of some musical people, and came up to bemoan her fate to Aunt Julia, and happened to arrive when I was singing in my best manner Tosti's "Goodbye." The ill-used lady was equally surprised and impressed. She imparted to Posie, "That I would be the *very thing!* That I would take Mrs. Cookson's place, and sing a couple of songs and play accompaniments. She had *no* idea that I had such a nice voice."

To me, she renewed her invitation with much warmth of manner, and assured me in her most imperious tones, that she would take *no* refusal. I suppose I shall be considered an exceedingly mean girl, when I confess, that after holding out for twenty minutes against Mrs. Shine, vigorously backed by my aunt and cousins, I relented, and said "yes."

For a whole year I had not been to any sort of amusement. I was still in my teens, and I had a very pretty fresh white dress made by my own hands. I would go to please Aunt Julia and the girls, I mentally remarked; but in good truth, it was one for them, and two for myself.

The day before the party, Mona and I had been, as I have already mentioned, slaving at the Rectory for hours. The drawing room was fragrant with creamy roses and small sheaves of sweet-pea and mignonette. We set out the tea and refreshment tables in the Reverend Cornelius' study (having banished him and his books into an empty spare room), where the coffee-cups, etc., were to be dispensed by Mrs. Shine's neat-handed parlour-maid, no handing round and slopping of tea, and risking good china in the crowded drawing-room! At length our last finishing touches had been put, and to do us justice, the Rectory drawing-room, hall, and study, were completely metamorphosed.

Mrs. Shine, having minutely inspected all the arrangements, expressed her entire satisfaction, as she waddled with us to the gate, that soft summer's night.

"Thank you girls," she said; "you have done it all elegantly! As for Ellen Le Marchant, she has the real London touch. (What did *she* know about London touches?) Everything is as stylish as ever it can be,

from the bull-rushes in the drawing-room, in the disguised umbrella-stand, to the drapery made out of my mother's pelisse on the back of the piano. I declare I don't know myself! I expect it will go off without a hitch, that is, if it's a fine day! First of all they arrive," now reckoning on her fat fingers; "then they go round the garden and pick strawberries. It's only the old ladies who are to be helped inside—I want to show off my good Spode plates. Then they have tennis—but I have only three balls. Fourthly, they come in and have tea. I hope I have cups enough. Fifthly, a little music, and then they go away—and I am sure I shall be truly thankful when it's all over."

Waving us out of the gate.

"Perhaps the guests will be thankful, too," I remarked unkindly, as we walked homewards.

"A scarcity of tennis-balls; a scarcity of cups——"

"There will be a worse scarcity than that," said Mona emphatically, "a scarcity of *men!* Last year she had twenty-seven ladies, and one man, and he went out into the yard, on pretence of speaking about his horse, got straightway on its back, and fled. We were too many for him! However, it was a pouring wet day. No doubt it will be better to-morrow, for I know that Mrs. Shine has literally gone out into the highways and hedges, to beat up bachelors, and coaxed and bullied, and even threatened them."

"She will be a clever woman if she produces any bachelors out of *these* highways and hedges," I retorted incredulously.

"Yes, it won't be like any party you have ever been at in your life. It will be a new experience for you, Nellie. There is something in that. I wonder if the Crolys will be there, and the MacCarthys. They rarely condescend to come to this side of the country, unless they are likely to meet officers; but when would Mrs. Shine get hold of them? I guarantee that Mrs. Shine's garden-party will be the tamest affair you were ever at in all your life. We have had all the trouble of getting it up as usual, and *you* are to provide the entertainment. What a clever old lady she is! Too clever by half."

"Clever!" I echoed indignantly; "I call her a

cunning, selfish, woman, whose motto is: "Never do any work yourself, as long as you can get others to do it for you."

"I have known worse mottoes," returned Mona, with a laugh.

But I would not laugh. I had borne the burden and heat of the day. I had been standing about arranging, draping, washing, dusting, for eight long hours. I was very tired. My heart was hot within me—and I detested Mrs. Shine.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SUGAR?

"They eat, they drink, in communion sweet."
—MILTON.

THE sun shone brilliantly and continuously, on the day of Mrs. Shine's garden-party. To quote Bob, the sexton, who opened the hall door to us (in a very seedy evening dress suit, once his Reverend Master's). "It was just as fine as if it had been bespoke." We were early arrivals, and found our hostess in a terrible fuss. Kate Crotty, her smart parlour-maid, had heard an hour ago that her mother was ill, "on the last, and the priest sent for." She had just gone off on an ass's car, throwing her mistress and her mistress' party to the four winds, "and did we ever know the like? What was to be done? The cook had to see to the boiling water for tea and coffee, and a smart girl was essential for the refreshments, and there was not one in the parish!" (except our Lucy). Mrs. Shine gazed at us stedfastly. We knew she was thinking of *Lucy*, but Lucy was out of the question, aunt could not be left alone, and Mona said so at once.

Whereupon, Mrs. Shine very handsomely offered to spare one of us, in exchange for our servant! I volunteered on the spot, but presumably I was almost as necessary as Kate Crotty; for Mrs. Shine pushed me back into my place quite angrily, and I was flattered to discover, that I was not one of those people, "who never would be missed," though I was uneasy, rather than gratified at this mark of distinction. In the end, it was

decided, that we were all to stay, but with the express understanding, that we were to make ourselves useful; we were to take it in turn to preside over the tea and coffee; the young men (if any came) would be sure to help us, and cook would keep a constant incoming tide of clean cups. Bob was to look after the claret and sherry, and Mrs. Shine herself would keep an eye on *him*; for (according to her) Bob was not to be trusted with any liquor — but water. Mona and Posie were desired to remove their hats, so as to appear as if they were staying in the house; but I was to retain mine. I was not sorry for this permission, for I rather fancied my hat—a coarse white straw, trimmed with scarlet poppies—alas! I discovered the reason of the exception in my favour before the entertainment was over. About four o'clock, numerous vehicles came noisily crunching up the newly-raked gravel. There were dozens of girls (of course) and also their mothers, a fair sprinkling of curates, a few young men, gentlemen farmers, a few of the country people, and I heard it whispered by two ecstatic maidens, "several officers from Drumdear." By five o'clock the yard was choked with carriages and dog-carts, and the narrow hall was almost impassable with warm and beaming guests. The drawing-room was crowded. In all my life, I had never heard so many brogues conversing together. I sat quite in the background;—for I knew no one, and no one knew me—I was the exception that proved the rule, for the company seemed well acquainted. The men after their manner hung near the door, in groups; and the ladies sat round the room, discussing servants, strawberries, dress-makers, and weddings.

"*Have* you been into the refreshment-room?" said a girl with a round red face, to another who sat beside her. "Quite a grand spread! and just look at this room! I suppose the O'Briens did it, for the old lady has no more taste than a cow."

"I hope the cup is better than it was last year," remarked an elderly woman, with a severe expression. "It made me ill for two days, and the sponge cakes were like flannel! Oh—" suddenly seeing Mrs. Shine bustling up to her, "how *very* nice everything looks;

what charming taste you have; what trouble you must have taken! This room looks so pretty, so different, so artistic. I really would never have known it!"

Truly this was a kind of left-handed compliment, but our smiling hostess accepted it, as well as all the others, with pleased affirmative smiles, and hastened to herd out the party to the strawberry beds—held inviolate for this supreme occasion. People began now to pass the windows, the room became emptier, shy youths, with inconvenient hands and arms, carried off pretty smiling girls, in dowdy dresses and amazing hats. The curates paired with some fashionable looking, reputed heiresses from Dublin. Mrs. Shine took a Dean under her wing, with inexpressible pride and triumph, and finally introduced me to a haughty handsome woman, with two haughty handsome daughters, who were the very last arrivals.

"Oh, Mrs. MacCarthy, *how* are you!" she exclaimed, "so glad to see you and Nelly, and Emily;" nevertheless she was not going to resign her Dean, to this august looking matron, and glancing at me said: "Miss Le Marchant, let me introduce you to Mrs. and the Miss MacCarthys. Miss Le Marchant" (to them) "is from London, staying in the neighbourhood. She will show you the way into the garden; almost everyone is there." The crafty old lady never identified me with the O'Briens, and why? Mrs. MacCarthy looked me over from my hat to my shoes, and apparently I found favour in her sight, for she unbent as we paced slowly along the garden path, and discoursed of the weather and the season. I piloted her to the best strawberry bed, and picked "British Queens" for her in a cabbage leaf, which she ate condescendingly, as she cross-examined me (her daughters being satisfactorily disposed of), sitting on a rustic garden seat, and with her parasol over her head.

"Have you lived long in London, Miss Le Marchant?" she inquired presently.

"Yes, almost all my life," I replied in a meek voice.

"Lately?"

"Not for a year or more."

"I am so fond of London," she remarked, and finding

that I had resided in a satisfactory part of the metropolis, and knew many people whom she had heard of, and had been to balls in smart houses, and had shopped at the most aristocratic shops, she dropped her veil of icy reserve, and figuratively took me to her bosom, that is to say, she made me come and sit close beside her, held her parasol over my head, and gave me a most spirited and spiteful resumé of some of the company who were now innocently strolling round among the strawberry beds and currant bushes.

"That young man walking with my eldest girl," complacently indicating a red-haired freckled youth, "is cousin to Lord Mufford. I am surprised to see him *here*, only I suppose he heard we were coming. That old woman in black and red, was a cook. That lady in the striped blue and white cotton is an officer's wife. You may always know them, by their walk—a sort of independent swagger. She is Mrs. Evans—excessively fast, and fond of admiration, and not at all the sort of person I should like *my* girls to know." A majestic inclination to a passing couple, and then: "One *does* meet such queer people at poor Mrs. Shine's parties, but a clergyman's wife cannot be very exclusive. By the way, who are you staying with; who brought you here?"

"I am staying—I am living, with the O'Briens," I responded meekly.

"What, of *Billy Park!* You don't mean to say so. I—I thought they never had a soul inside the doors. How extraordinary!" she continued with growing excitement.

"Not strangers, but *I* am not a stranger," hastening to unbosom myself without further delay. "I am their cousin—their first cousin."

"*Not* Mr. O'Brien's niece," in a tone of tragic protest.

"Yes," feeling my face become ridiculously warm.

"Then," rising and casting away her cabbage leaf, with quite a dramatic gesture, "your name is no more Le Marchant than mine is."

"I am always called Le Marchant," I urged timidly.

"People and things should be called by their *real* names, and some people should never be *heard* of. If you will take my advice, Miss Le Marchant, you will

return at once to London, where your antecedents are not *known;* for if you imagine that you will be received in society over here, your anticipations must be at once dispelled."

And having made this awful speech, she stalked off, carrying her parasol very erect, leaving me with scarlet cheeks, a lump in my throat, and tears smarting in my eyes. Would it not be advisable for me to slip quietly away home, and hide myself? Anything was better than being looked upon as a leper, a kind of social pariah. I could easily steal out of the back gate of the garden unseen, but here was Mrs. Shine approaching, with a purpose in her eye.—There was no escape from her.

"Ellen, my dear, will you go into the tea room, and take Posie's place, like a good girl: she has been there ages. You must come along and take your turn," and she hooked her portly arm within mine, and carried me off bodily. The tea room was a busy scene, and as I took over the urn from Posie, she frankly informed me that she "wished me joy of the post.—There were no clean spoons, and the cream was running short." However, things were not quite so black as they had been painted. I soon got in fresh supplies, and it was well I did; for people began to pour in from the garden. What a clatter of tongues! "One cup of tea and no sugar;" "two cups of coffee without milk." I could not help listening to the jeers and sneers at Mrs. Shine's garden party. "Nothing to do, no tennis; no rounders; no amusement—a fine day *wasted.*" I heard half the county gossip; heard that "John O'Brien was in very deep water, at his last shilling, and that he was always a soft-hearted, extravagant fool." Still I struggled to keep my head, and to attend to my numerous customers, with intelligence and despatch. Cups were brought and filled, and taken away very briskly, by people, whom I scarcely ventured to glance at. After my dreadful adventure in the garden, I felt afraid, and ashamed, to look any one in the face, and kept as much as possible behind the shelter of the ample, family tea urn.

"Sugar?" I enquired, as I filled a cup, tendered by a masculine hand, and grey tweed sleeve."

"Miss Le Marchant!" was the reply, in a tone of unmistakable amazement.

I looked up and saw Captain Karslake—*my* Captain Karslake—I mean the only one I knew. I could scarcely control a startled exclamation. I was so surprised that I nearly knocked down and smashed one of Mrs. Shine's most precious Spode plates.

"Miss Le Marchant," he continued; "*can* I believe my eyes; what are you doing here?"

"Pouring out tea and coffee, as you may see," I answered, dropping several lumps of sugar into the cup in his hand.

"Excuse me," he said; "I will be back in a moment, when I give a lady this cup of tea." And in less than a moment he was again beside me, and unless his looks belied him, he seemed rather pleased to renew our acquaintance.

"How do you happen to be here may I ask; do you live here at the Rectory?"

"No, I live with my uncle, Mr. O'Brien of Billy Park."

"And those are your cousins in the next room?"

"Yes."

"Allow me to help you; at least I can pour out the coffee," he said eagerly. "You have your hands full; more than you can do."

"Yes, but mind what *you* are about. Oh, Captain Karslake! You have put hot milk into those cups of tea."

"All right! I'll do better next time. You have never asked me what *I* am doing over in these parts?"

"No," I returned sedately.

"My regiment is quartered in Drumdear. I have been here since February. Why are you on duty here over the tea?"

"Mrs. Shine's parlour maid left her suddenly this afternoon, and my cousins and I have taken her place."

"I should think it was about time you were relieved," he returned. "Who is keeping the roster?"

"I will relieve you of *your* share," I rejoined; "you have just put two lumps of sugar into the cream jug."

"By Jove, so I have! I thought it was a cup, but I was thinking of something else."

I looked round the room and saw Mrs. MacCarthy, with one fair daughter, standing in the doorway, surveying me with marked disapproval. Captain Karslake's assistance and attentions, were not lost on her, nor on Mrs. Shine, who came bustling over and said briskly:

"Now, really I cannot have you wasting your time in here. Captain Karslake, will you just take Miss Emily MacCarthy for a turn in the garden."

"I should be delighted, Mrs. Shine, but as long as Miss Le Marchant remains at her post I am bound not to desert her. We are old friends." (Old enemies he meant.)

Mrs. Shine muttered something indistinctly, and with anything but a benevolent glance at me, fastened on another man, and sent him forth with her young protégée.

Now," exclaimed my coadjutor, "I think that is the very last cup. Let *us* go and take a little turn in the garden." We threaded our way slowly through many curious faces in the hall, and then boldly set out to saunter up and down the avenue, within full view of the drawing-room windows.

"And so you never married Bellamy after all," was the first remark he made.

"No, would I be here if I had married him?"

"And you ran away the morning of the wedding!"—

"'There was racing and chasing on Canobie lea,
But the lost bride of Netherby ne'er did they see!'

"In plain language, there was the very deuce to pay?"

"So I should suppose," I answered calmly.

"You know you won't be able to show yourself in town for years."

"I never wish to see it again, so think of some other Bug-a-boo!"

"And you are quite contented where you are?"

"Yes, although this is the first party I have been at since I last saw you I am perfectly happy. I never was so happy in my life."

"And what do you do, how do you pass your time in this earthly Paradise?"

"We walk, we read aloud, we work, we garden, we water the flowers every evening.—I like that above all things."

"Well, people's ideas of supreme happiness differ widely. A Frenchman's notion of happiness, is eating pâté de foie gras, to the sound of bugles, an English rustic's is devouring fat bacon and swinging on a gate; yours is watering flowers on a summer's evening!"

"And yours?" I enquired, with a smile.

"If I said that it was meeting you—"

"Do not say it"—I rejoined with a laugh. "My credulity is not my strongest point!"

"How long have you been in Ireland?"

"A year—I came here—on—the—day—I—I—"

"You mean on your wedding day," he added, coming to my assistance, "and I have been here six months, and never once met you."

"Yes, but I never go anywhere. I do not know any of the people in the neighbourhood."

It occurred to me afterwards, that my companion never enquired the reason of my seclusion—which was strange.

"There are not many at this side of the county. May I come and call on you: I mean on your aunt and uncle?"

"I suppose you may," was my ungracious reply; "but I must impress on you, that we are very quiet people."

"What! *You* quiet! It is incredible."

"Captain Karslake," said a tall girl, accosting him: "Did you get mother's note? I hope you are coming to our picnic on Thursday?"

"I shall be delighted; thank you."

"What has become of Colonel Kant to-day?"

"Oh, I—Oh—I really cannot tell you. I believe he could not get away—was seedy. This place does not agree with him."

"Dear me, that's a pity. What a delightful man he is! Be sure you tell him how we all missed him," and with a little nod and a smile, she passed on.

"Is Colonel Kant in your regiment?" I enquired tremulously.

"Yes, he is our second-in-command. He loathes this part of the world."

(And no wonder, I said to myself. I was not surprised to hear that it did not *agree* with him!)

"And do you like him; is he nice?"

"Hum!" he paused. I knew that he was cudgelling his brains to avoid a direct answer. "I don't think I have ever seen a nice man, but I know lots of nice girls. Are you acquainted with him?"

"No," I replied; "but I have heard of him; was he once in the 25th Hussars?"

"I believe so. You appear to take an interest in him."

"I do," I rejoined laconically. I hoped Captain Karslake did not see how I was trembling.

"He is a handsome, or rather he has been, a handsome man in his day." Captain Karslake had an expressive voice, and I knew instinctively that he did not like Colonel Kant, and there was a touch of impatience and contempt in his tone, as he added, "He is a great ladies' man. I am sure he would be charmed to make your acquaintance."

To this I made no reply, and just at this instant Posie came hurrying up, and said breathlessly:

"Nellie, Mrs. Shine has been hunting for you everywhere; You are to come in and sing—*at once.*"

I could not get out a note, if it was to save my life, and I said so. My nerves were completely unstrung, by several things that I had heard that afternoon.

"Oh, Nellie," continued Posie, bluntly, "you know she relied on you. She asked you on purpose. She will be so awfully vexed, and I have heard her telling so many people of your voice, and how you are a pupil of Sopranotti's."

"I will go in, and play the accompaniments," I returned, "but I am sure I cannot do more—Tell her so please."

"I did not know you sang," said Captain Karslake. "Why can you not favour us this afternoon?"

"I—I don't feel up to it," I stammered, and possibly my pale face and tremulous lips, assured him of my good faith. Men are vain. They admit as much

themselves. I wonder if my former foe was laying the flattering unction to his soul, that an unexpected meeting with him, had upset my nerves?

There was quite a significant hush when we entered the drawing-room. I wondered if every one present now knew *who* I was?

As Captain Karslake escorted me to the piano, I encountered various pairs of judicial eyes, notably those of Mrs. MacCarthy, and of the lady who had suffered so severely from Mrs. Shine's refreshments! Their looks acted as a spur to me. I found my courage and my voice, and sat down with complete self-possession, and played a few preliminary chords and sang, amidst a most complimentary silence, "There came to the beach a poor exile of Erin," a bold and suggestive song to warble amid such company. I felt carried out of myself, and sang with such fire and brilliancy, that I received an ovation that caused every ornament in the drawing-room to tremble in its place. After this, I played accompaniments for all the other vocalists; for clear, sweet untrained trebles, for growling basses—and notably for one man who bellowed about "a warrior bold," as if he were shouting through a speaking trumpet.

"You sang splendidly," said Mona rapturously, when all the guests had departed. "I felt so proud of you. I felt as if I had sung myself. People *raved* about your voice."

"Yes," said Mrs. Shine complacently! "people don't hear singing like that—at every garden party.

Mrs. MacCarthy thought it was too operatic! What squeaking little voices her girls have. They really ought not to be encouraged, to make such exhibitions of themselves!

"And did you know Captain Karslake before, or was it just one of his jokes? These officers will say anything!"

"Yes, I knew him in Scotland and London."

"Ah, well, only for that, I should have been obliged to scold you, for monopolising one of our few beaux for the whole evening."

"You mean that *he* monopolised *me*," I retorted indignantly, "and only for half an hour."

"Oh, well I don't know know about *that!* [redacted] need not look so haughty. People were rem[redacted] that's all! After all why should he not please [redacted] Eh?" and she gave me a playful poke. "I am s[redacted] girls, that you did not see Colonel Kant He sent an excuse by Mr. Jarvis. He is such a handsome man, like an Italian, and has most delightful manners. I suppose there is some tea left?" turning to me with a sprightly air, "let us go in and have a cup, just as a wind up, and talk it all over."

But we three firmly, but politely, resisted this mild debauch; we were very tired, and it was getting late. I also knew, that the resources of the tea-pot had been taxed to the very last leaf.

"Well, well, then I won't keep you! I am sure you must be nearly dead. I know *I* am. I think it went off very well. Every one said the arrangements were *perfection* and that it was a great success. I wish I had thought of saving a few 'British Queens' for your mother, but if you saw the garden now, you would say a swarm of locusts had gone over it. It's as bare of fruit as my hand," and with a wave of that mittened member, we were finally dismissed.

CHAPTER XXV.

ABOUT SPOONS, AND SPECTRES, AND STRAWBERRY JAM.

"For destiny drove us together, like bees in a pass of the hills."
—A. C. L.

MRS. SHINE was not a woman to receive favours by *halves;* we were therefore obliged to repair to the Rectory the next afternoon, and help in what the cook called "redding up," a performance in which her mistress played a very subordinate part! I was detained to the last to count and receive the tea spoons, and the moon was high in the heavens, and it was 8 o'clock when I set out to walk over to Billy Park alone. I crossed the road and entered a little wicket-gate which led to a short cut to the house, and hearing the "*trit trot, trit trot*" of a horse coming along the hard highway, I thought I would wait and see who it was. Equestrians were rather a

especially at such an hour, so I closed the gate, ng my elbows on the top of it, waited, with over my arm (it was a very sultry evening) and a ge brown paper parcel (the spoons) in my hand. The trotting ceased; the man, whoever he was, was evidently walking his steed up the hill. Was it the doctor? was it uncle? was it young Fletcher of the mill?' I could not make out at first, for the trees overhead threw part of the road into deep shadow. He came nearer and nearer, and I saw that it was a stranger—a gentleman—possibly an officer, riding a very fine bay horse. He was dark and slight; his head was turned away, and he seemed to be smoking a cigarette. All at once, my packet of spoons rolled off the top bar of the gate, on which I had rested it, and fell with a crash into the road, thereby causing the horse to shy, and drawing the rider's attention to myself. He was a swarthy, foreign-looking man, with dark, deliberate eyes, black arched brows, and a pointed moustache. Somehow he irresistibly recalled a stage Mephistopheles. The instant he saw me, he gave a violent start. As his glance met mine, an alarming change came over his dark, lean face, his eyes seemed about to spring from their sockets, his lips worked convulsively, whilst he clung to his horse's neck with both hands. What was the matter with him? Surely he was not going to have a *fit!* I slowly pushed open the gate to pick up my parcel, and as I did so, he made a frantic gesture of horror and repudiation, as much as to say "avaunt fiend," and instantly setting spurs to his horse, galloped down the hill at a pace that would have left Tam O'Shanter and his mare, literally nowhere.

As I ran out into the road, and looked after him, as it were, flying for his life, the incident tickled my easily aroused sense of the ludicrous, to such an extent, that I laughed uproariously. I laughed both loud and long! What matter if he heard me! since he had taken me to be a ghost, he would merely believe that I was a wicked, mocking spirit!

As I paced slowly homewards, a new and startling idea dawned upon me; *this* man was no lunatic; no, nor a gentleman who had swallowed an o'erstrong stirrup

cup. It was Colonel Kant, and he had taken me for my mother—so much for having a guilty conscience.

* * * * *

By all good housewives, the sultry month of July is generally dedicated to jam-making, and two days after Mrs. Shine's entertainment, Mona and Posie and I, boiled pounds of fragrant strawberries, and broiled our own fair faces over an enormous copper stew-pan, in what had been in prosperous times the housekeeper's room. Towards four o'clock, with a palate cloyed with "skim," and a face outrivalling the red, red rose, I left my cousins to their fate, and ascended to the upper regions with the intention of cooling myself (?) by mowing the pleasure ground. Having tied on a garden apron, and stuck one of uncle's old hats on my head, I threw open the hall door, and to my great discomfiture, discovered a tall red-wheeled dog-cart in front of it containing Captain Karslake and another officer.

The former alighted promptly, and introduced his companion, "Mr. Jarvis," a young man, with large, dark blue eyes, and a small fair moustache.

"I hope we shall find your aunt and cousins at home," said Captain Karslake politely.

"My aunt is an invalid, and never sees any one," I replied. "My cousins—well, my cousins—are downstairs, making jam," I added in a burst of unnecessary frankness.

"Jam?" he echoed. "I've never tried my hand at that, but I used to have a great reputation for toffee, though now that I think of it, you had either to cut it with a hatchet, or eat it with a spoon!"

By this time, I had recollected my manners, and invited our guests indoors, ushering them into the drawing-room. Its three long windows overlooked a pretty view of the park, and with all the fresh chintz covers, rare old china and quantities of flowers, it was an eminently respectable apartment. Leaving them to be entertained by Shawn, a red-haired terrier, who seemed inclined to be more suspicious than friendly, I fled away, throwing off hat and apron, as I ran, and bouncing into the housekeeper's room said:

"Girls, there are two officers in the drawing-room,

Captain Karslake and Mr. Jarvis. I opened the door for them by accident; and such a figure as I was. Lucy had better bring up tea presently, had she not Mona? The best silver, and china, and luckily there *is* a cake."

I stopped breathless.

"Now I just ask you, impartially, how *can* we appear," said Mona, putting her hands to her scarlet cheeks; "and look at Posie's hair; it's like a last year's bird's nest."

"You are no worse than I am," I retorted. "Here take off your aprons," divesting Mona of hers, "and come at once."

"No, no; we will just send up tea," she said, and leave you to do the honours. You are well able, as they say here."

"Then if you won't appear, neither will I," I returned resolutely; "and they can just sit there, till they feel inclined to go away."

Much startled by this alarming idea, my two cousins gave in without another word, and reluctantly accompanied me back to the drawing-room. Tea was not long in making its appearance, and after we had discussed the weather, the distance from Drumdear, and Mrs. Shine's party, we adjourned in a body to the garden, the usual finale of a country visit on a summer's day. The garden at Billy Park was walled in and ancient; it had belonged to the old house, and was noted for its bees, cherries and yew tree walk; quantities of delightful old-fashioned flowers lined the borders, lavender, hollyhocks, wall-flowers, pink moss roses, and white pinks. Aunt Julia's windows overlooked it, and consequently it was kept in very fair order. Mr. Jarvis strolled ahead with my cousins, and seemed to have a good deal to say to them, whilst Captain Karslake and I lagged slowly behind.

"And so *this* is where you have lived for the last year," he said, plucking a bit of lavender from a gigantic bush and looking about him: "I don't wonder you like it, it's a charming old place."

"Yes, here I have lived in great contentment. The world forgetting, by the world forgot."

"I doubt the truth of the latter part of the quota-

tion," he returned. "You have dwelt in *my* memory, for one."

"Yes," I interrupted with a laugh, "as a very obnoxious school-girl."

"And do you suppose that Mr. Bellamy will *ever* forget you?" he continued expressively.

"Do not speak of him," I returned pettishly; "talk of some one else—of Captain Colin Maxwell: is he still in your regiment?"

"No, or of course he would have been over to see you. He has retired, and is taking life quietly, sporting among his native wilds."

"Is Colonel Kant a thin, dark man, with a hooked nose, and does he ride a bay horse?" I asked abruptly.

"Yes," he returned, with a searching glance, and almost scornful brevity.

"Then I have seen him.—I saw him the day before yesterday."

"You are not likely to see him again, for he went away on leave this morning—on sick leave," rejoined my companion, in a tone of cordial satisfaction. Just at this moment we turned the corner of the yew tree walk, and came face to face with uncle—uncle with a watering-pot in his hand, and his most battered hat on the back of his head. His surprise was plainly set forth in his speaking countenance. No soldier had set foot in Billy Park for more than twenty years, and uncle shrank sensitively from smart, prosperous-looking strangers, as your elderly broken-down gentleman not unfrequently does. I introduced them immediately. At first uncle was inclined to be somewhat cold and stiff, not on account of his threadbare shooting coat and sunburnt old straw hat, but because he was probably asking himself, "What on earth brought these fellows, prowling round the garden with his girls?"

I hastened to explain, with much volubility, that I had known Captain Karslake for some time, and under the pleasant influence of that gentleman's manner, and the utmost exertion of his charming social powers, he thawed so far, as to invite him out into a croft to inspect a promising two-year-old colt. He accepted a cigar (I never knew till then that uncle smoked), and at

the moment of departure, they were actually deep in a mutual project for the 20th of August, and I was secretly pleased to see that my former enemy had made a good impression! This visit was returned by uncle, under strong domestic pressure. We never gave him any peace, until he had sallied forth in his Sunday coat, and left cards on the Colonel and officers of the True Blues. Captain Karslake's call was the precursor of many, and his cousin, Mrs. Evans (with Major Evans) drove over and made our acquaintance. She proved to be the lady who left so much to be desired in her deportment in Mrs. MacCarthy's opinion; we found her charmingly affable; if anything too candid and outspoken. She was tall and self-possessed, and dressed in the latest fashion; wore smart tailor-made gowns, steeple high hats, and carried a walking stick. We actually ventured to give a little luncheon party to our four new friends and the Shines; also one or two gipsy teas, and they paid several long visits to our strawberry beds, and carried off many bunches of roses and lavender. Mrs. Evans also accepted donations of fresh butter and cream cheese, with a grace and gratitude, that insured future favours to come, filled her drawing-room vases thrice a week with flowers from Billy Park, and established herself as a friend of the family; she professed to be in love with auntie (whom she rather overpowered) and to be ready to fall down and worship the dressers full of old china, that we had set up! Mrs. Shine beheld this going and coming between the barracks and Billy Park, with unaffected complacency. She was in a state of great exaltation, and could scarcely restrain little songs of triumph, as she saw what she deemed a prospect of "getting the girls settled at last;" she actually went so far as to privately consult me with respect to Captain Karslake's attentions to Mona, and "did not I notice that he was a good deal struck, and was it true that his uncle was a Baronet? He had been to church the last *two* Sundays, and was really a very gentlemanly young man, and what did I think?" She never suspected for a moment that it was to saunter with me, in tangled shrubbery walks, that he manœuvred so audaciously, that it was with me he walked and talked,

whilst the others plucked flowers and ate fruit; but far be it from me to undeceive her! no more than I would have dared to hint that it was *not* to listen to the Reverend Mr. Corney's long narcotic sermons, that he and Mr. Jarvis tramped four miles in the dust of a Sabbath afternoon; I am afraid it was for the carnal pleasures of the subsequent tea at Billy Park, and a stroll round its attractive gardens.

Against every invitation to the barracks, Aunt Julia had set her refined little face; but what objection could she make to the regimental sports, when Mrs. Evans offered to fetch us herself and return us home punctually and safely? After many family convocations, it was settled that we were to go, and we departed one sunny morning, in great joy, in Mrs. Evans' roomy waggonette. Mrs. Evans was always very pleasant to all of us, but especially *empressé* to *me*. I had often wondered why I was so specially singled out for her smiles, and flattering little speeches? Why she always took my arm when she promenaded in the garden? and this day she divulged the reason. She had the superficial kindness of a good-humoured, self-satisfied nature, that fears no undertaking, and brooks *no* contradiction.

"Come into my snuggery," she said, after luncheon. "I have something I particularly want to show you." She was so extremely mysterious about it, that her cousin chaffed her and said:

"To hear you, Annie, one would think you had discovered the man in the iron mask or the private letters of Queen Elizabeth? What wonderful thing are you going to exhibit?"

"What it is I am not going to tell *any one* but Miss Le Marchant," she answered, as she pushed me playfully out of the room before her.

"What do you think of the fit of this dress," she enquired, when we were alone, standing with her hands on her hips, surveying herself complacently in a long glass.

I expressed my admiration in fitting terms.

"And this necktie, isn't it sweet? and this duck of a pin?"

I agreed to both without demur.

"Oh, well; but of course you are wondering what I am

going to show you. Look here," handing me an excellent photo of Captain Karslake. "What do you think of *him?*"

"I think it is a very good likeness," I answered, in some confusion.

"Yes, but that is not the point. I want to know if you *like* him?"

"Yes, I do," I replied frankly. (We had long ago sealed our reconciliation, with raspberries and currants, and found those former days of warfare, quite a delightful reserve of reminiscences and jokes.)

"You know that he admires *you* immensely; in fact, he is over head and ears in love with you! and as he is a very good fellow, I like to put in a word for him, and help a lame dog over a stile."

"Mrs. Evans," I exclaimed hastily, "please—please don't say such things. I know you are joking, and I don't like it."

"I am sure you are ten times nicer than that horrid Scotch girl who jilted him," she continued, as if I had not spoken. "I sent her a lovely silver bowl, and she actually *kept* it! Now, now"—kissing me violently—"please don't look so proud and haughty. I am sure you like Jim, every one does. I thought I'd pave the way for him; he will be very well off, and has only a mother and sister. The old lady is nice enough, but beware of Miranda; don't let her crush you——"

"Mrs. Evans!" I exclaimed angrily, my temper now as hot as my face.

"There, there, I hear Tom calling us. I never get a word with you, out of earshot, and I was resolved to say my little say—and I have said it."

But I had not had *my* "little say!" Before I could get in one word of negation, deprecation or expostulation, I was being swept downstairs, in charge of "Tom."

CHAPTER XXVI.

MONA'S PROPHECY.

"Love is begun. This much is come to pass,
The rest is easy."

I WAS both angry and embarrassed, when I had heard the fine piece of news Mrs. Evans had so eagerly imparted. I told myself that it was pure imagination on

her part, and, indeed, on our very short acquaintance, I had noticed that she talked a great deal of nonsense, on the spur of the moment took the world into her confidence, on all sorts of subjects. She was quite wrong about Captain Karslake, quite—nevertheless the hint she had given me made me feel unpleasantly awkward and constrained. We met in the hall and walked down to the cricket field, where the sports were to take place, and I manœuvred so as to have the escort of Major Evans, a little bald man, with heavy eyelids and a squeaking voice; thus leaving Captain Karslake and Mr. Jarvis to the girls, and very nice they looked, as they strolled down the steep streets of Drumdear, paved with dreadful three-cornered stones. I felt quite a thrill of pride, as I surveyed their hats, in whose manufacture I had had more than one finger. They held their own in the company of that magnificent, expensive and probably London structure, that adorned the crown of Mrs. Evans'—I began to think—rather giddy head.

Tents had been erected, flags were flying, a band was playing on the cricket field, crowds of carriages were drawn up outside the ropes, and the said ropes were lined with swarms of country people, who had been admitted to see the fun. The races—the sack race, wheelbarrow race, three-legged race, and donkey race, evoked tumultuous applause, and roars of laughter, the donkey race, especially. One animal kicked off his rider about ten times, being a long way the most spirited jackass I had ever seen. The perseverance of the rider, or rather would-be rider, who, nothing daunted, would chase and mount Neddy again, to be again sent flying, was so extremely ludicrous, that I laughed till I cried, and the tears actually rolled down my cheeks. As I turned to find my pocket (no easy matter now-a-days) and to get hold of my handkerchief, I noticed an old woman sitting on the wall close by, with a little boy beside her. She had a blue cloak over her head and a pipe in her mouth, and was looking, as far as I could see, as grave as a tombstone, and watching, not the donkey race, but *me*. Who could she be? I wondered as I returned her gaze. Then all at once I recognised her—Mrs. Duffy and Patsey, her grandson.

"Miss Le Marchant, you are missing all the fun," said an aggrieved voice at my elbow. "What on earth are you looking at? That queer old crone perched on the wall?" in a tone of surprise. "You can see *her* any day, but look, look, at this dead heat between the two brown donkeys; that fellow will be off; yes, and the one with the lop ears wins as he likes! Oh, I don't know when I've laughed so much. My throat is hoarse and dry. Come along and let me get you a cup of tea," said Mr. Jarvis, breathlessly. As we walked towards the tent, old Mrs. Duffy rudely elbowed her way up to me, and laid hold of my dress with her claw-like fingers.

"Get away, old lady, get away," said my escort. "Surely this old witch is no acquaintance of yours."

"Just wan word, Miss dear, wan word asthore."

"Well then, one word!" I returned impatiently.

"Did it do you any good, *what ye know of?*"

"No, not yet."

"Ye got it *too* chape altogether. I go in dread of my life for Jim, if he was to suspicion the turn we have done him!" and she raised up her withered hands and bleared old eyes. "Have you the price of a pound of tay about you, darlin?"

I had half-a-crown, which I thrust into her greedy palm.

"I was in luck to see you. Miss dear! I was just in town by chance and the gossoon Patsey dragged me in here, the more fool me, to be said, or led, by the likes of him!"

Mr. Jarvis was waiting with unconcealed impatience. I could stay no longer. With a hasty nod, I made my escape.

"An old pensioner, I suppose," remarked my escort. "She looks like one of the witches in Macbeth. There is nothing uglier than an ugly old woman, and nothing prettier than a young one. There is your tea at last."

Captain Karslake did not notice me; he was making himself extremely agreeable to Mona, doubtless because I had given him a little of my "Glenmore" manner, and was almost as rude and snubby as I used to be at the Maxwells'. He scarcely came near me all day, but he looked at me more than once, with a glance of swift critical in-

quiry that said quite plainly: "What on earth is she driving at now? What have I done?"

After all, what *had* he done? Nothing; why should I lose all my day's pleasure on account of a few idle words spoken by Mrs. Evans' too glib tongue. I would ten times rather talk to him—with whom I had so many acquaintances in common—than to Mr. Jarvis, or to the half-dozen other young men to whom I had been introduced in the course of the afternoon. After the sports, we strolled back to the Evans' house, and had a cold, daintily cooked meal, that would pass for either dinner or supper, and then Major Evans and Captain Karslake undertook to drive us home; the latter was coachman and invited me to share the box-seat? Why should I not? Why cut off my nose to spite my face, even although Mrs. Evans stood giggling on the steps? It was a lovely July night, the moon was shining through the trees, the scent of new mown hay was wafted on a little night breeze from the surrounding meadows, and the mysterious corn crake was still calling "crake," "*crake*," as we trotted all too quickly homewards. The three in the body of the waggonette, enjoyed themselves immensely, told stories, gave riddles, and made a good deal of noise. We on the box were more silent, but still we managed to have some rather serious conversation. We found ourselves upon the interesting subject of engagements: how or wherefore, I do not know, and my companion said:

"It is a strange thing, that there is a similarity in one way, between you and me."

"How do you mean; we are not the least alike."

"No, no, I am not so vain as to presume to think that. I mean in our—shall I call them—love affairs?"

"Call *yours* what you please," I returned expressively. "There never was an atom of love about mine. I never pretended it, and Mr. Bellamy did not expect it. I don't know what love is; but you—you—it was quite different with you and Lily Norton."

This was plain speaking, and possible not quite palatable to my companion, for he made no reply beyond giving the off horse a very wicked flip of the whip, perhaps as deputy for me.

"You do not deny that, do you?" I reiterated.

"No; I am human. I don't deny that I was a fool."

"Am I to suppose then that all people who are in love are what you call fools."

"No; I should be very sorry to say so."

"Then why were you an exception?"

"It was my misfortune. As to Miss Norton, or rather Mrs. Flint, to love her has been a liberal education, but not in the sense Sir Richard Steele meant."

"Still you have not told me, in what there is such a striking similarity between us."

"Have I not! Well, it is just this! I have been jilted by a girl, my sweetheart, and you have done the same to yours."

"Do not call Mr. Bellamy my sweetheart, please."

"No, not if you do not like it; but all the same you were within sixty minutes of being his wife, were you not?"

I shuddered involuntarily and made no reply.

"I don't think he will ever try matrimony again," said my companion with a short laugh.

"Nor you either," I retorted unguardedly.

"And Miss Le Marchant?"

"No, never."

"Of course you say that, but you don't mean it."

"Do I not?" I echoed indignantly. "I can assure you that I do, and if any other girl had had such a dreadful experience as I had in being engaged to Mr. Bellamy, she would say never, never again. I used to feel as if I was going to be hanged, and when I sat in the room with him alone, I was nearly as much afraid of him, as if he was a cobra, or a Bengal tiger."

"What a happy experience. I wonder if Miss Norton's feelings were the same with regard to me."

"Oh no, you are not the least like him. You know that as well as I do. You are only fishing for me to say something nice to you."

"If I were—from what I know of you of old, I might toil for days and catch nothing."

"Well, I will tell you this much," I volunteered generously. "We all thought you ten times too good for her. Girls know girls best. She is mean, treacherous, and sly. You had a lucky escape."

"Thank you, Miss Le Marchant. I suppose you wish me to lay these sober truths as a kind of balm to my lacerated feelings, but I do not think Miss Norton was what you say. She merely exercised her sex's privilege, and changed her mind. You will change yours too some day. All men are not Bellamys."

"It is not alone the remembrance of him, and his hateful attentions, and being trotted about as his fiancée, that makes me say that I shall live and die an old maid. There is another reason."

"Oh, indeed," in a rather blank tone.

"I"—I began, and then I stopped. No, why should I reveal our family secret. "I——" and my voice died away.

"Is there a woman in the case as usual?" he asked sarcastically.

"No."

"A man?" in a tone of expecting anything, however bad.

"Yes, but I have nothing to say to it myself," I explained rather incoherently.

"You speak in riddles. You are as mysterious as that old hag, who told our fortunes on the moor in Scotland. Do you remember that she hinted that they were bound together?"

"I remember that shetalked a great deal of nonsense."

"Nonsense or not, we *have* seen a good deal of one another ever since, have we not—not to speak of our having been married!"

"I wish you would not recall unpleasant subjects," I exclaimed, feeling my face on fire. "First you will talk of Mr. Bellamy, and now of *that*."

"Supposing it had been, as they wanted to make out, The *real* thing. Do you remember?"

"Yes, and I remember very distinctly, how terrified you were! You were literally *white* with fear," I returned maliciously.

"Your memory is too good; that is one of the things I wish you could forget. Well, here we are," he said, pulling up his horses, at the hall-door. "I don't believe it is four miles by road from Drumdear. It can't be more than two. I am coming over again to-morrow, or

next day, with some books I promised Mrs. O'Brien." He then bid us good-night (to me last of all), and mounting the coach-box drove briskly away.

"Well," said Mona, "we have had a most delightful day, and the drive home was not the worst part of it. I have heard numbers of new riddles for mother, and one ghastly ghost story. You and our Jehu were very quiet, Nellie. What mischief were you in? What were you talking about?"

"Let me see," I answered reflectively. "We talked of the moonlight, and of memory, and of our former love affairs."

Mona and I were standing on the steps that lovely summer's night. The faint trot trot of the horses was still audible in the surrounding stillness. Posie had gone yawning up to bed, and we were alone.

"Nellie," she said, suddenly laying her hand on my shoulder, "you may talk of your former loves, as much as you please, but you will have a present one—a joint stock affair before long, as sure as my name is Monica O'Brien—I give you my blessing and my consent."

Of course I repudiated her prophecy, with indignation and scorn, but when I came to examine my own feelings, as I sat in the window-seat of my room, looking out on the park, half radiant, half dark, in the silver moonlight, what was the summing up? the true verdict?

I liked him. Even to my own heart I would not admit *more*, but Mona had very sharp eyes, and perhaps Captain Karslake's feeling for me went further than mere liking? My heart swelled with a sensation not wholly untinged with triumph, as I recalled the visit we had paid to the Maxwells, and his abhorrence of me! Truly in some cases, to quote grandmamma, "there was nothing like beginning with a little aversion." I had always been the least prejudiced of the two; in my secret heart, I had never really disliked him, but I was angry and mortified at his disapproval of me! Now I could turn the tables on him if I chose, but would I? Besides, when he knew all my family history, was it likely that he would think of me as a possible wife? I went to bed and tried to sleep, but I had too much subject for thought to be successful. I reasoned with myself, and

fought stoutly against ever intrusive memories, of Captain Karslake's words, and looks, and pleasant voice—and fought in vain.

After that evening, we had many visits, from the Evanses and Captain Karslake, but in all our walks round the garden and grounds, I took particular care never to stray away beyond earshot, nor to linger behind my cousins, nor to give him any opening for asking a question, that I knew was ever trembling on his lips, for I knew equally well, that then all these happy days would be over. I would be obliged to tell him *all*, to put that terrible test before him, and I was certain that he would not stand it.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CAPTAIN KARSLAKE LIVES AND LEARNS.

"And what am I to you? A steady hand
To hold, a steadfast heart to trust withal;
Merely a man that loves you, and will stand
By you, whate'er befall."

—J. INGELOW.

I KNOW nothing more depressing, than two or three successive and determinedly wet days in the height of summer. For winter one does not mind; they are expected—if not absolutely welcome; but to wake up on what ought to be a lovely August morning, and to see the rain rolling mournfully down the panes; the great trees in the park blurred in mist; to see the hens (my despair) bunched up and draggled, sheltering under bushes in the pleasure-ground—where they know they have no business to be—and to hear a monotonous drip, drip, drip, coming steadily down the yawning chimney, does not tend to elevate one's spirits. For two days we had not seen the sun. He was hidden away behind a dull, leaden-looking sky, that poured down inexhaustible sheets of water; we were all tired of hammering at the weather-glass. We were tired of one another's company. I hated staying in the house even in wet weather. I had not put my nose outside the door for two days, excepting across to the dairy. On the third afternoon it looked lighter, there was certainly a sea under-foot, but the rain was a mere drizzle; so I

put on a pair of strong shoes, a thick shawl, and an old hat, and gallantly volunteered to go down to the post, and endeavoured to arouse Posie to accompany me. Posie, who was half buried in a comfortable chair, over an excellent fire, with a novel in her hand, flatly refused to do anything of the sort, and looked upon the expedition as akin to madness.

"Go *out?* Why it's pouring cats and dogs! Why can't you stay at home like a reasonable being. You will be drowned. The letters can wait. One would think you had an uneasy conscience, Nellie. I never knew such a restless mortal. Why can't you sit still and enjoy yourself like me. The third volume of *this* "—tapping her book—"is somewhere about."

"One must have some exercise," I pleaded apologetically.

"And were you not churning all the morning?" said Posie in a dry voice.

"That's not what *I* call exercise. Well, good-bye, I am off. I am not sugar or salt, so you may expect me back to tea."

I went out, I faced the rain, it was nothing, my thick grey shawl shook it off, and my old black hat had often been out in worse. I enjoyed the light drizzle falling on my face. I had no umbrella, to tell the truth, mine had been blown inside out so often, that it had completely lost its figure, and I was rather ashamed of its appearance. I duly posted the letters, and received two instead and a newspaper. One of the letters was from Toosie Maxwell—sheets of writing in a gigantic hand—I opened it on my way home and began to read it, as I walked slowly along. Toosie was going to be married; and of course the object of her affections was everything that was perfect, physically and mentally. She was the happiest girl in Great Britain. Of course I would be bridesmaid —*that* was understood. Lily Norton had come home —Lily Flint now—and people said that she and Mr. Flint did not hit it off at *all*. At any rate he had not accompanied her! She was dressed like a dream, but was looking as sour as an unripe gooseberry. I had got thus far, when I heard the clip clop, clip clop, of a horse's hoofs, trotting along the wet road behind me,

and presently the head and neck of Captain Karslake's brown hunter were on my right hand.

"Miss Le Marchant," said its rider, pulling up. "This is indeed an unexpected pleasure."

"Nothing is so sure as the unexpected," I returned playfully.

"What a day for you to be out!"

"It's not nearly as bad as it looks," I replied.

"No, that's true," he replied, dismounting as he spoke, and walking beside me.

"What a day for a *ride*," I remarked, looking at his horse, which was in a lather, his own coat, with the collar turned up about his ears, and his appearance warranting the notion, that he had ridden far and fast.

"I could not stand being indoors any longer and—and—I was wondering if you would all think me quite mad, if I had dropped in to afternoon tea? One gets so sick of hearing nothing but shop, shop, after being boxed up together for three days, and a little of ladies' society would be an agreeable variety."

I muttered something about our being "charmed"; but I had an uneasy conviction, that Mona and Posie would be found at a sore disadvantage, in their very worst old frocks, and that the tea would be more homely than elegant.

"I wonder you are not apologising for the way it rains in your country, Miss Le Marchant. I would never have believed it if I had not seen it."

"It's not half as bad as the west coast of Scotland," I returned stoutly; "and talking of Scotland, reminds me I have a letter in my hand from Toosie Maxwell."

"Indeed! And what is the best news with her?"

"She is going to be married to a Mr. Mackenzie, from Perth, a man of very good family, with quantities of money, and, according to Toosie, both young and handsome."

"Nonsense, you don't say so!" he exclaimed, in a tone that gave me to understand, that he was astonished at Mr. Mackenzie's taste.

"Yes, so she tells me; she also says—" once more opening my letter and rattling it in a manner that excited the terror of the brown horse, "that—oh—let

me see—something that will interest *you*—Lily Norton —I mean Flint, is at home." I read—"Mr. Flint has not accompanied her, and his enthusiasm about the fair Lily has cooled considerably. Perhaps he has found her out already. She looks extremely well, though very cross and discontented—if you can imagine such a combination—and dresses exquisitely. I mean to find out who makes her gowns, with a view to my own trousseau."

"Then, if she is going to give you a list of her frocks —spare me," said my companion, putting up a dog-skin hand, and nearly extinguishing my eye with the lash of his whip. "I've got something particular to say to you, Miss Le Marchant."

Now it was coming! I was sure of it, and my heart began to beat very fast.

"You remember those theatricals at Glenmore, and the fuss there was about the wedding?"

"Yes; but I told you——"

"Just hear me for one second. I want to ask you, if you will marry me in earnest."

"This is a joke of course," I declared—to gain time; but all the same I knew perfectly well, that it was not.

"No, I never was more serious in my life."

"You forget that you said once upon a time, that I was an awful girl."

"Most likely I did, but you know quite well, that I have changed my opinion long ago. I have lived and learned."

"Learned what?" I asked tremulously.

"To love you," was the brief and pithy reply. "Come, give me my answer and don't trifle with me," he spoke in a hurried voice, and his face was white with agitation.

"You have a very strange way of speaking," I said, with forced calmness.

"Still you know what I mean—You know me pretty well by this time, and I know *you*. Is it to be yes or no?"

"It must be no," I replied, fearful of the sound of my own tongue. A very awful pause took place. For fully twenty heart-beats he said nothing. I saw that he

was drawing the horse's reins towards him, was it possible that he was going to ride away without another word?

"Stop one moment, Captain Karslake, and listen to what I have to say," I faltered hastily.

"I know what you are going to tell me. There is some other fellow: you hinted as much the day I drove you home from the sports. I was a fool to have persevered, but I did think that you were beginning to like me, and you must have seen long ago, as well as all the world, how it has been with me. This is the second time a woman has deceived me, and the last. I thought that you at any rate, were a girl of honour; that, after refusing to marry for money alone, and descending to poverty by preference, I could believe in you; that you accepted my society—though I am not very clever or brilliant—and seemed to like it, has led me to build up hopes that you have just had the pleasure of shattering. I am sure you must despise me in your heart; that you are laughing at me in your sleeve! to think that within eighteen months after my experience from Miss Norton I dared a second venture! Your correspondent makes merry over the misfortunes of her acquaintances. Well, you can write back to her in the same strain about *me*. Tell all particulars! Omit no details, how you led me on from day to day, how you beguiled me with——"

During this torrent of words we had been standing face to face in the road—I gazing blankly up into his handsome angry face, trying in vain to abate the storm, to get one word in, but he was resolved to unburthen his mind, and give me *no* opening.

"Stop," I interrupted at last; "you are quite wrong; everything you have imagined about me is wrong. There is no one else I care for, that was not the reason; if I had only myself to think of I would marry you to-morrow: no, no, *no*, I don't mean *that*, but I do like you very much; better than anyone—better than Auntie or Mona even. It is only right and just, that you should know this, but it is no use. You must forget me—and I—you——" at the thought of the difficulty—the impossibility of this latter feat—I broke down, and covering my face with my hands, began to cry, which was the very last thing I would have wished to do.

"Of course, when you have told me so much, you must tell me more, Nellie—Miss Le Marchant."

"There, there is the reason," I said, lifting up my streaming eyes and speaking in gasps. "I am not Miss Le Marchant at all! I am Miss Deane. I never was told of this till I came here and—and there is something a thousand times worse—something dreadful to tell you *yet*——" and I paused.

"I know all that," looking at me steadily. "You are the daughter of Philip Deane—We need say no more."

"How long have *you* been aware of this?"

"I have known it for a long, long time. I knew it in London. He is dead these many years, and when you are my wife, it is no matter whose daughter you were."

"Do you mean that that makes no difference; that you would marry me all the same?" I enquired bluntly.

"Yes, of course I would, and be only too glad."

"But think of what your relations would say?"

"Their opinion would not influnce me, one way or the other. I am independent. They will never know, except my mother. I shall tell *her*."

"And your brother officers?"

"They have no idea that you are any one but Miss Le Marchant, and, at any rate, their consent is immaterial."

"I cannot think why you wish to marry me."

"Because I love you—the best of reasons."

"I bring you—a blackened name."

"You will change it for mine——"

"Supposing that I say yes—will you promise me never, never, in days to come, 'to bring up,' as they call it, this dreadful subject, nor to twit me, should we quarrel, with the fact—and it *is* a fact—that my father nearly suffered the—the extreme penalty of the law, and was transported for life."

"Your asking me to make such a promise, shows that you have formed an exceedingly low opinion of my character, Miss Le Marchant," he said very stiffly, "and——"

"Don't be angry with me," I interrupted impetuously; "if you only knew the fearful burden that this disgrace is to me, oh! you would *pity* me."

"And love you," he added quietly, "I may—may I not?"

I raised my eyes and met his: mine drooped abashed. My story was told; the unbidden eloquence of a look, had made the cold expedient of speech unnecessary.

"Then you say, yes," he exclaimed, seizing my hand eagerly, and finding it no easy matter to hold his restive horse at the same time. Moreover, "Shawn" was unaccustomed to seeing me laid hold of by people on the King's highway, and barked and yelped round his riding boots in a very alarming manner. Neither he nor the horse approved of this loitering on the road on such a damp afternoon: he was anxious to hurry back to a warm room, and a bright fire and buttered toast, and the horse was equally eager to be careering towards his comfortable stable and his corn.

"Yes," I repeated in a whisper.

"And I may speak to your uncle to-morrow?"

"Poor uncle; he will be very glad."

"Sorry, you mean. I do not know what they will do without you, Nellie," still holding my hand tightly in his.

"I wish you would let my hand go," I exclaimed. "There are some people coming with a turf-cart. What will they think?"

"I suppose this is the way you went on with Bellamy?" he said; and I could tell by the tone of his voice that he was deeply affronted.

"No. Do you imagine that I ever allowed him to hold my hand at *all*, much less for five minutes.

"At any rate, he kissed you, I suppose?"

"He did once," I admitted. Now a deep scarlet—"I—I—" tears starting to my eyes—"I shall never forget it."

"No!" rather sarcastically. "I should be surprised if you *did*."

"You are angry with me," I exclaimed, with recovered composure. "It strikes me that we are quarrelling already. If it comes to talking about Mr. Bellamy, pray what about Miss Norton? You were really in love with her. Now I have never been in love in my life——" and then I luckily added the word "before."

"It was well you put that in, Nellie. We won't allude

to Miss Norton, or anybody after to-day; but now that you belong to me, I feel the most ungovernable fury, when I think of your being once engaged to Bellamy. It shows how fond I am of you, when I am so bitterly jealous of the past, and that one kiss—I hope you are not going to let me be behind *him* in that respect?" and he paused, and looked at me significantly.

"Not here!" I protested hastily, backing towards the hedge—"not here in the middle of the road!"

"Why not? One place is the same as another!" and stooping his head, he kissed me, and what is more, a girl who was picking stones in a field saw him and stared, as well she might. She could not be more horrified than *I* was, and to prevent a repetition of this scene, I contrived to put the horse between us, and when I had slightly recovered my composure, I stammered out by way of changing the subject:

"You must come and see Aunt Julia. She never receives strangers, for she is an invalid, but I am sure she will see you, and now I can tell you many things I could not speak of before! She has a nice suite of rooms and a maid, and we manage so that she does not guess how badly off uncle is. Poor uncle, with hardly any rents from farms, with mortgages, and heavy charges on the property, he has hardly a penny." All this I gabbled forth incoherently, to hide my deep confusion.

"He has all that," said Jim, pointing to the demesne wall of imposing dimensions.

"It's more for show than use. He has not cattle to put on the land. However, he is a little better off since our Aunt Susan died."

"And how does he manage to get along?"

"He makes something by his hay and turf, and you must not be surprised to hear, that we make lace and sell it. I am sure you would scarcely believe that I can earn a pound a week at my needle. I know you won't think any the worse of us for this, and we help in the house a good deal, for we only keep two servants"—(I did not count poor Leary in his dotage, and his constant maudlin regret that there was nothing to "buttle").

"What, in that great big house, only two servants?"

"Yes, I was churning all this morning," I smilingly replied.

"What you—*you* yourself," in a shocked voice.

"Yes, I myself, I make excellent butter now. I have a nice cool hand," holding it out with a laugh. I had no gloves on.

"You have a very pretty one," taking it at once, "and as it belongs to me now, I won't have it spoiled any longer by making butter. I don't know what they will say, when they hear that I am going to carry you off. I feel a wretch, as far as they are concerned, but charity begins at home!"

"I've something to ask you, Captain Karslake."

"Jim, you mean—my name is Gervase, as you may not know, for all the fellows call me Jim."

"Well then, Jim, when I am one of the ladies of the True Blues—dear me, how funny it will seem! I will never see, or know, or meet, or speak, to Colonel Kant."

"Why?"

"I do not like him. I can give you no other reason, and I know you won't mind.—You don't like him yourself."

"Who told you that, Miss Sharp Eyes?"

"My sharp eyes, as you call them."

"Well, we will see what can be done. He is certainly not a man that I at all care about my wife knowing," (speaking precisely as if he already had one) "nor is he a desirable acquaintance for pretty young married ladies."

"By the way, am I? now no joking or nonsense, am I, what you would call pretty?"

"No jokes or nonsense. I never saw any one that I thought as pretty—or as vain—"

"Vain! *I* vain? How can you say so? Look at my clothes! Look at my hat?" pulling it off, as I spoke. "Would any vain girl be seen in such a thing?"

"You don't require dress, you look just as well in that old hat and shawl, as in any of your smart London frocks, and, by the way, Nellie—" pausing, we were now outside the gates—"*what* will your grandmother say?"

"She will say that we concocted it long ago in

London, and that it was the real and true reason of my running away," I returned with a laugh.

"But it wasn't—was it? he asked eagerly.

"No, certainly not. I wonder *who* is vain now? And oh! I was nearly forgetting that I have something *nice* to tell you," I said, suddenly recollecting my father's information, respecting grandmamma's money.

"You would not suppose it, to look at me, I am sure, but I am an heiress."

And I dropped him a neat curtsey.

"What do you mean?"

"It is quite true, all grandmamma's money must come to me one day. I believe it is a good deal, and I have something *else* to tell you," I added more gravely. "I have not expressed half, or quarter, of what I feel to you, for asking me to be your wife, when you believe me to be the daughter of a——" I could not bring out murderer—the word stuck fast in my throat, so I paused and then added—"criminal."

"Bellamy did the same."

"Out of pure contrariness, because he knew that I did not wish to be his wife. He would have me—also I believe he knew that I would have a large fortune."

"Any man who cares for a girl, marries her for herself. Besides, it is not hereditary like madness, though no doubt the act was committed in a moment of temporary insanity."

"I have reason to think that it was not committed by him at *all*. If I did not believe this honestly and truly, from the very bottom of my heart, I would never dare to be your wife. At present, all I can give you is empty words, but I hope to live to see my father cleared yet," and in my eagerness, I laid my hand upon his sleeve. Jim said nothing. I knew that he did not wish to damp my feelings, but he looked upon my eager declaration, as a girl's wild idea, that would never bear the light of common sense, much less a legal examination.

"I hope what you say may come true," he rejoined at last; "and now Nellie," looking at his watch," it is five o'clock; where is your hospitality? Are you not going to invite me up to tea?"

"No, not this evening," shaking my head.

"Why not, pray, and especially *this* evening?"

"I should like to tell them first."

"I will do that for you with pleasure, only perhaps they will throw the knives at me."

"Come to-morrow," I said, turning away, and opening the gate, and entering the avenue.

For all reply, my future husband mounted his now most rampant steed, and was actually about to gallop away. Indeed he *did* go a little distance, the horse with "Shawn" at his heels, progressing in mad leaps and bounds. Jim rode admirably. It was nothing to him apparently, if the animal stood on its head. On second thoughts he came back, and pulled up outside the gate (I being inside).

"I think Nellie," he said, with very forced composure, "that you might have—I won't say, asked me up to tea, but, considering all things, said good-bye to me. If you really cared two straws about me, or a millionth part of what I care for you—you'd never go away without a word, and slam the gate in my face."

Jim was not angry—he was not angry at all! No, he was, what was far worse, he was hurt. I looked up into his nice troubled dark eyes, through the intervening gate, and was penitent. "I will say good-bye to you then," standing on one of the iron ornaments, and thrusting my hand through the bars.

"One would think I was a wild beast!" he exclaimed, with a dawning smile, as he reined in his impatient steed, and took it, aye, and kissed it fervently.

I did not snatch it away this time. No, the horse snatched Jim away! He could not endure this ridiculous fooling, neither could "Shawn," who, squatting in the muddy avenue, stared at me indignantly as much as to say:

"What *are* you about? Do you know that *I* am watching you?"

"Come over to-morrow—come early," I called out, remorseful for my inhospitality, and then I waved him a final adieu, and ran away up the drive. But at the first turn I halted, and looked back; yes, he was still at the gate—still gazing after me.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NEWS ON A WET DAY.

"Pluck out the heart of my mystery."

IT was just as well, that I had not invited my fiancée to return home with me, and share our frugal meal. He would have discovered my cousins sitting over the fire, with an old dress that they were ripping between them, a brown teapot on the hob, and a very mixed tea-set on the table. We could not risk our best china every day!

"What ages you have been!" exclaimed Posie, looking up as I entered, and stretching her arms over her head with a yawn; "what in the world kept you?"

"I don't know what you mean by ages," I returned, not wishing to plunge into my news at once. "I've only been an hour."

"You must have crawled home; any letters or news," said Mona, now putting down her scissors, and surveying me critically. "What a colour you have got!"

"Yes, both," holding out a letter.

"Oh, from Mary," opening it and running her eyes over it; "nothing but about the weather. Take off your hat, Nellie, and sit down comfortably," making room for me beside her, as she spoke, "and now for your news? I suppose you met no one such a day as this is?"

"Yes, I did," I replied, turning away to remove my damp hat and shawl. "I met Captain Karslake."

"Oh," ejaculated Posie; "well, and what was *his* news? I am sure it is something out of the common by your face. Don't stand there with your back to us, Nellie, but tell us the worst at once; they are not going away, are they?" she added, rather anxiously.

"No, not that I know of, and—and—the short and the long of it is," now facing them boldly, "that if they were going, I have been invited to accompany them, as Mrs. Karslake. I suppose I may call that news."

"What," ejaculated Posie, half rising; "what are you saying?"

"I always knew that this would be the end of it,"

exclaimed Mona, after a moment's pause. "I am delighted; of course you said yes, Nellie. I *hope* you said yes?"

I merely nodded my head.

"I think you are a very lucky girl," she continued, "and he shows his good taste, but does he *know?*" lowering her voice to a mysterious whisper.

"Yes, he knows all about it."

"You told him!" in a higher key of astonishment.

"He heard it long ago, long before I knew myself."

"And it makes no difference; well he *must* be in love with you," said plain-spoken Posie. "I wish any one was as much in love with me."

"But what shall we do when Nellie goes; how shall we get on without her?" broke in Mona.

"You will have Mary," I said consolingly.

"Mary," said Posie, in a tone of contempt, "of course she is our own sister, but as a help in the house with our ways and means, she is of no more use than Shawn. Your little finger, is worth more than the whole of Mary's hand. Putting it practically, Nellie, you will be a very great pecuniary loss."

"I always knew we should not keep her," remarked Mona calmly; "but I must confess that this news is a blow. Now you will no longer belong to us, Nellie. *He* will be coming here and taking up all your time, and then you will be married, and go away quite out of our lives, and we have been so happy together," winking away two tears. "I can hardly believe it is only a year since we were so furious at hearing, that father was shut up with a pretty young lady, all alone in the parlour of the 'Wolf and Harp.'"

"I'm not married yet, cheer up!" I said, stooping for the teapot, and preparing to make tea for my two relatives, whom my news had so prostrated that they were incapable of taking any steps in that direction for themselves; "and when I am, you shall both come and stay with me often."

"Yes, that will be something to look forward to," said Posie, in a more cheerful tone. "We can always do that; that is the only pleasant aspect of the case. I suppose it will come off soon," she continued drawing

up to the table. "The sooner the better, if you take my advice," nodding her head solemnly.

"In case he may change his mind?" I asked in a voice of angry interrogation.

"No, not that, but his people might get round him. They might head him off, as I once heard Mr. Jarvis express it."

"And if they did, he would be no loss! at any rate I mean to plead for a long day—a long day your honour, like the man in the trial."

"And Judge Norberry, cut a joke at his expense, and said, I'll give you till to-morrow, the 21st of June, the longest day in the year! Wasn't he an old wretch!"

"Talking of old wretches, I wonder what your grandmother will say?" enquired Mona, as she slowly stirred her tea, and looked at me meditatively.

"Nothing; she has washed her hands of me long ago."

"You will write of course," continued Posie, "it's as well to keep in with her. You are making a good match, a really suitable one this time, and after all it's only a stamp," with a sudden burst of extravagance.

"Yes, I suppose I must write, but there is no hurry yet."

"What will you do for a trousseau?" enquired Mona, as if stung by some unhappy thought. "You have only one respectable gown for Sunday or Monday."

"Time enough to think of that yet," I said seriously.

"Oh, if your granny would only relent, and send you the other."

"She might," said Posie cheerfully.

"Pigs might fly on a windy day," I answered rudely, now rising and shaking the crumbs off my lap.

"You don't look half as much pleased as you ought to," remarked Posie, in an aggrieved tone; "such a handsome man as Captain Karslake is too, so gentlemanly and popular, and frightfully in love with you. I don't believe you care a fig about him; you are not half as much elated as the evening you came home after selling Mona's big veil to Rosie MacCarthy for nine pounds. Now honestly, *are* you?"

"Do you expect me to be singing and dancing?" I asked sarcastically. "I do not mind confessing to you honestly, that I am so happy and so bewildered, that I

can scarcely believe that I am Nellie Le Marchant, will that satisfy you!"

"What did he say?" enquired Posie. "How did he put it?"

"I shan't tell you."

"Where did he propose?"

"In the middle of the road—how many more questions?"

"Only *one*," said Posie, with a hateful grin. "This is last but not least—did he *kiss* you?"

Hereupon I became scarlet with both shame and rage, at which my cousins laughed delightedly, and then I became more angry than ever. I told them they were a pair of vulgar inquisitive girls, and placing my fingers in my ears, to shut out their jibes, I gave them a piece of my furious mind, at which I could see that they laughed more heartily than ever!

At last Mona took me round the waist, and said, or rather shouted in my ear:

"Well, there—she shan't be teased any more. Come upstairs and tell mother; how delighted she will be. It is not often we bring her such good news."

Aunt Julia was at first astonished, but when she had got over the shock, and became accustomed to the idea, she was charmed, and kissed me as warmly as if I had been her own daughter, not that she had seen her future nephew-in-law, save a bird's-eye view from her window, as he walked in the garden, but she had had his portrait painted for her, in glowing colours, by my two cousins.

"And you tell me, dear," she said, when we were alone, "that he is going to marry you, knowing *all*."

"Yes, Aunt Julia, and I never would have said yes, nor accepted his generosity, only that I have good reason for believing that my father will be cleared some day."

"Oh, my poor Nellie! you young girls are so sanguine, but time soon grinds all hopes of that kind out of an old woman like me. Twenty years ago it happened this very next January, twenty years and no light yet."

"Before another year goes over our heads, people will no longer say that Philip Deane murdered Mr.

Sim; they will say he was a cruelly wronged man. I am *sure* of it Aunt Julia," I said with more emphasis than prudence.

"Why?" catching my hand suddenly, "do you know anything. Have you found out anything. Oh tell me —speak," and the poor little woman began to sob.

"I have my own ideas," I returned more cautiously.

"Ideas! Oh if that's all, everyone has plenty of them! What would be more useful, Nellie, would be proof, even one proof of his innocence, but we might just as well expect the moon to fall," and she relapsed once more among her pillows with a sigh. I thought of the coat, the pocket-book and the tobacco pouch with a quick thrill of triumph, but I was silent—I dared not tell her yet.

My engagement to Captain Karslake, entirely swept all tragic thoughts out of my head for a time. I was two different people, I said to myself; one, completely and utterly engrossed in the idea of bringing Colonel Kant to justice, a strange cold-blooded persevering creature, not the least like everyday Nellie Le Marchant, absorbed when alone, in the contemplation of one aim, ready to risk everything to reach that aim, ready to barter time, youth, money (if I had it), and yes, if it came to the push—I was ready to risk my love, too. A dull, fierce determination to drag the real culprit to light, filled my veins with fire, my mind with a fever, that was quite novel to my usual rather volatile, and *laisser aller*, character. But just for the first few weeks of my engagement, I cast care, and what I considered my "mission," behind me, and abandoned myself to the happiness of the moment. I was very happy, and indeed I had every reason to be so. Jim came over to Billy Park as often as duty permitted, riding, walking or driving—he brought me flowers, a lovely diamond ring—books, and all manner of nice presents. He kept our larder supplied with game, and drove us constantly out in a charming T cart, with a pair of cobs, and I, who had not a sixpence wherewith to bless myself, felt how very delightful it was to be going to marry a man, to whom sixpences were no object, and shillings immaterial. How different to the last time I

was engaged! The cases were reversed. I domineered over Jim when I discovered my power (and that was before I had been engaged three days). He, it was plain to perceive, looked upon me as a being that belonged to a sphere far above his own, and that I was, to say the least of it, the fairest, purest, and most perfect of my sex. I was very far from that, but still I think I may say that we were well brought up girls, and curiously innocent, and I may add the old word, maidenly, for our years, and for the times we lived in. Jim was very nice and brotherly to my cousins, and affected not to notice our occasional straits in the housekeeping line, or laughed with us, and put us at our ease. Indeed, we were better off than formerly. Uncle had become quite jovial, he, who at first shunned Jim as if he had the cholera, was now his constant companion out shooting; he became another man under the beams of a little prosperity, and the circumstances of Jim's presence, and not only insisted no giving a dinner in honour of the happy event, and having up some of the last bottles of the '48 claret, but he actually suffered himself to be inveigled into dining at mess, where he was led on to talk of "his boy in the service" (Brian) and played a game of billiards and spent altogether a right merry evening. Jim paid various visits to Aunt Julia, and was soon established in her good graces; he had a nice voice, she said, and nice manners. She read him bits of Brian's letters and put probing questions about mess expenses. Must a young man, a subaltern in India, have three hundred a year beside his pay, or shoot himself? This was a poser for Jim; they nevertheless got on famously, and he privately confided to me his amazement at the luxury of her surroundings.

"Poor Aunt Julia," I said, "she thinks the *whole* of the house is to match, as it was, when she was last downstairs. She adores Brian; he is her favourite child, and he has nearly broken her heart. He is a bad son, he gambles, and races, and poor uncle has had to pay his debts over and over again. He keeps four polo ponies, and a couple of hacks, and says he cannot do without them!"

Mrs. Evans came over very promptly, and welcomed

me as a new cousin, with effusion—query, would she have been so charmed with dear Jim's choice, had she known as much as *he* did of my family history? "I trow not," as they say in old plays. Miss Anne O'Toole also hastened to congratulate me. She also brought me a wedding present, a little old, old brooch, with a coppery gold rim, setting off a small hair-sketch of a tomb and weeping willow—a lugubrious gift—but it was all she had to offer, and was most kindly meant; she kissed me, and blessed me with tears in her dim old eyes, and said, "I believe you will be happy child, for you have a *lucky* face." Miss Anne O'Toole was another guest that I was resolved to have to stay with me, or if she was impracticable, I was determined to do her some good turn surreptitiously, in the shape of a little legacy. But Mrs. Shine did not weep over me, or bring me a gift in her hand! She received the news of my engagement with an unutterable horror and dismay; her already long upper lip, was still further elongated, when she heard the unwelcome intelligence. Nothing will ever persuade her, that I did not rob my unhappy cousin of her lover. *No* arguments, explanations, protestations, would avail me. When she so complacently contemplated the "settling of the girl," *my* establishment had never entered into her schemes. I was a snake in the grass (she said so, and I heard it), a viper, whom they had taken in and warmed and fed; and she never now alluded to my eldest cousin, without a long-drawn affected sigh, and always as "*Poor* Mona." In spite of all that Aunt Julia could say, that *I* could say, that *Mona* could say, Mrs. Shine refused to be comforted. (I am sure, indeed, I know to this day, my baseness and Jim's perfidy, forms one of her favourite stock stories.) As to Mona, she used to laugh till the tears came into her eyes, and one day she said, "Of course every one saw from the first, that Captain Karslake had eyes for no one but you. Posie and I might have been two stuffed figures for all he cared. He never gave me one thought, and handsome and pleasant as he is, I would not marry him, for he is inclined to be very jealous and——"

"And, you like Mr. Jarvis, so *very* much the best of the two," I put in smartly.

"Nellie, how can you say such things," she enquired indignantly.

"Without the slightest hesitation," I returned promptly "why should I not say what I think? This is Liberty Hall."

Jim was very anxious that I should ride with him, but I had no relish for horse exercise, and refused to trust myself on the back of a very ladylike looking bay horse that he brought over one morning for my behoof. I could see that he was keenly disappointed, but I could not help *that!* He was such a good horseman, he would have liked me to shine in the saddle too, but I assured him that a very small pony (such as the white one on which I had once travelled) was the most that I could manage, and that the mere sight of a horse saddled for my own riding, gave me violent palpitations, as well as a sensation of cold water trickling down my back, and that I was concerned to see that he was anxious to get rid of me so *soon.*

This settled the question, and Posie (whose mouth had been figuratively watering at the very sight of a side saddle) was only too charmed to take my place; she had a respectable habit (a remnant of better days), and soon she and Jim were wildly careering across the demesne, a pair of kindred spirits. She had the real Irish element for riding, and rode capitally. I watched them vanish over a high paling, like two birds on the wing, and felt extremely angry with myself, that I could not furbish up sufficient nerve to ride, like my cousin Posie. I was a little jealous of her too; she and Jim would have a delightful afternoon together, whilst I, like the little pig in the nursery rhyme, "stayed at home." It must not occur again; in future we would drive, and we did. We took many long excursions, Jim and I in front, and the girls behind, for he was teaching me to drive, and here he found me a really capable pupil. I had strong wrists, good hands, and a quick eye. I was not long before I was allowed to steer the cobs, although once I allowed them to run away; they did not go far—for Jim pulled them up, and once I very nearly carted my cousins out upon a stone heap, but everything must have a beginning! As time went on, I improved, and could

actually be trusted to turn in at the avenue gate alone, and I was exceedingly proud of my new accomplishment.

Grandmamma took no notice of my letter, but one day, to my delighted astonishment, four large trunks addressed to me, arrived by the carrier. The contents proved to be my trousseau! minus the wedding dress. This was indeed an unexpected event. This was coals of fire with a vengeance. We had a very congenial occupation in looking over all the things in Aunt Julia's room. What a pleasure it was to her to see me unpack and unfold and display dress after dress: such garments as for style and fabric she had not seen for years, and then I tried them on by special desire—ball dresses, dinner dresses, tea gowns, one more lovely than another; all purchased for Mrs. Bellamy, all to be worn by Mrs. Karslake. We were to be married about Christmas, so I was not to have "a long day" after all; Jim was going in for second leave, and intended to spend his two months in England and present me to his friends. I wrote to my father *viâ* Drumdear post-office, and acquainted him with my approaching marriage, and almost by return of post I received the following letter:—

"My dear Ellen,—Your piece of news did not surprise me, and I was very glad to hear it. Karslake is a fine young fellow. I know all about him, and you are a fortunate girl to get a good husband, who is marrying you for yourself alone, knowing that your antecedents are steeped in disgrace, I hope you will make him a good wife (as good as your mother made me), and never give him cause to be less fond of you than he is now. Of course he does not know that *I* am still above ground. Be sure you keep *that* secret. I am making very little way with the business, a ticket-of-leave is naturally an object of suspicion, and what he says, or shows, after being convicted and transported, carries no weight. Besides this, I have very little of that great lever of mankind—*money*. The coat and pocket-book are not believed in here. The coat might be any one's coat, they say, and as to the pocket-book, I may have hid it *myself*. After all, if I fail over

here, I shall trust to K.'s guilty conscience and to you, but I have not come to that just yet; and of course your mind is engrossed with other things at present. Send me your address when you are settled,

"Your affectionate father——"

There was no signature.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MARRIED IN EARNEST.

OUR wedding was a very quiet affair, and took place on Christmas Eve, in the little parish church. Uncle gave me away, and Mona, Posie and Mary were bridesmaids. We went straight to the railway station from the church There was no returning to Billy Park, and we were spared both déjeuner and speeches. Mr. Jarvis was best man, and was so occupied with Mona, that he did not sign the register, which was perhaps as well, as he would have seen that it was not Miss Le Marchant, but Miss *Deane* who had just been married. Our small, but select, little party looked their best: the girls in pretty brown dresses and velvet toques, and they each wore a sable bow and muff, Jim's gift. I insisted on something really useful, instead of the proverbial little brooch, or flimsy fan, and they carried bouquets of crimson flowers, Mr. Jarvis's offering. The day favoured us; it was bright and frosty. The sun shone on the crystallised leaves, and the holly berries and flimsy silver cobwebs that hung from tree to tree. My heart beat very fast, as uncle and I drove up to the church door, and Mr. Jarvis handed me out with a grin. I was going to be married *this* time, and no mistake. There was Mr. Shine waiting within the communion rails, book in hand; there was Mrs. Shine, glaring from the Rectory pew; in another ten minutes the ring was on my finger, and I was Mrs. Karslake. We parted with all our friends at the church porch. Mona and Posie hugged me and shed tears over me, and I cried a little too, but was not quite certain what I was crying *for*, unless it was to keep them in countenance. Mary (although my

oldest friend) did not weep. (I did not care for her half as much as for her sisters.) She had imparted to me that I was very much altered in appearance, and had also fretfully remarked that "I was *always* going to be married," this, after an exhaustive examination of my trousseau, when I am afraid the poisonous cup of envy had begun to work in her mind—Mary adored pretty dresses.

We went to London on our wedding tour, where I was formally introduced to my mother-in-law and Miranda her daughter.

They received me tolerably well, quite as well as I expected, considering that the former knew *all*, and that the latter had always intended George to marry a most particular friend of her own, and I represented in my person, a very great disappointment to one, and a fearful shock to the other. Still I was a lady. I was Jim's wife, and I was personally inoffensive, and they endured me politely, but the week I spent in Grosvenor Street, I was wretched, especially when Jim (happy man) went to his club, and I was left alone with my new relations and their friends, who flocked in to afternoon tea, to be presented to the bride, and I felt that I was on show, like some very new and superior kind of wax doll. These afternoon teas and drives and visits with Mrs. Karslake, senior, were oppressive beyond measure. At last I struck, and said to Jim quite plainly:

"I always thought one's honeymoon was supposed to be something to look back on all one's life! I shall look back on mine with a vengeance. I hate it. Jim, why did you bring me here? Your mother watches every look and gesture of mine, your sister whispers about me with her friends, before my face. I am sure I heard her telling someone yesterday about Mr. Bellamy."

"A guilty conscience," he returned jocosely.

"I have always to be on my good behaviour, and in my best clothes, and when you come in and venture to sit beside me, and laugh and whisper too, your mother looks quite shocked, as if it wasn't *proper*. I wish I was back at Billy Park," and I burst into tears.

"You are a little goose," he said; "but if it comes to

that, it is as bad for me as for you—worse—for you don't want to *smoke*. Do you think I am not sick of this state visit? But you see, my dear girl, I am an only son, my mother (though her manners are frigid) means well, and is very fond of me, and will be of you by-and-bye. She admires you, which was a great admission on her part. It was necessary that you should be formally presented to what's called the "connection," and that our marriage should not be a kind of hole-in-corner business, and I brought you here to show that I was not ashamed of you—to let them see you with their own eyes. You know none of my people were at the wedding, but now you have run the gauntlet, we will go away the day after to-morrow if you like; we will run over to Paris, and then down to Nice. No need to shiver in England, if we can help ourselves!"

"And I need never come here again, Jim? Promise me that," I said standing up, and laying my hand on his shoulder.

"Not unless you like," he replied mischievously.

"*Like!* I heard people-in-law were disagreeable, now I know it. I don't understand how you can be so different to your mother, with her formal ways, calling me Mrs. Karslake, and speaking to me of you, as "your husband;" and as to Miranda, the way she stares at me is positively insulting!"

Jim laughed again.

"You may laugh," I cried indignantly, we were standing alone looking out of the library window, "but you will just go and tell your mother, that *your wife* is not disposed for an airing this morning; that you are going to take her for a walk in the park, and that we shall not trespass on her kind—a—hospitality after Thursday."

Jim laughed till he had to lean against the window-shutter for support, and called me a little tartar and a termagant in private life, but he went all the same, and did my bidding, and took me for a nice long walk in the park, and then we sat in the shade on two penny chairs, and stared at and criticised the riders. Quite close to us, an elderly gentleman on a splendid cob, had stopped to speak to a friend across the railings. He glanced up

casually, and behold it was Mr. Bellamy! He saw me; he saw us, and I shrank instinctively closer to my natural protector.

"Oh Jim," I whispered behind my big white parasol. "Do you see who that is? Mr. Bellamy."

"So it is," coolly returning Mr. Bellamy's stare. "You need not be afraid of his coming over here and seizing on you. I declare you look quite frightened—there, there he has gone."

"The very sight of him, has spoiled all my pleasure. Do let us go out of the park."

"No, nonsense, if you get up and bolt, he will naturally imagine that it is your uneasy conscience, and that you are unable to bear the remorse, the sight of him has awakened in your bosom."

"It's all very well to laugh Jim!" I pouted.

"Those laugh generally who win."

"But the very sight of him makes me quake: remember he has never seen me since that terrible day last July, year, and when he sees me sitting here with you, I suppose he knows that I am married to you—you can imagine his feelings. I daresay if he could do it neatly and safely, he would murder me.

"Possibly his feelings are not as acute as you suspect. Now, I could behold Lily Norton with the most complete *sang froid*—could take her in to dinner——"

"Oh, but you are married," I interrupted. "*You* are consoled."

"And you imply that he is *not*. Vanity, thy name is Ellen Karslake. Come, we will go and lunch at Verey's and go to a morning performance at one of the theatres, and forget all about Mr. Bellamy's broken heart."

We underwent a solemn state dinner, that same night, in Grosvenor Street, where I was presented to half-a-dozen stout old ladies, blazing with diamonds, and half-a-dozen bald old gentlemen, "who knew Jim when he was a boy." There were a few younger guests, friends of Miranda's, and everything was very grand, and stiff, and solemn.

"How glad I should be to get away!" I thought, as I glanced up the table, and met Jim's eye. This talk of the weather and politics was very wearisome. How

much nicer a snug little *tête à-tête* dinner, just our two selves, where I could laugh and talk as much as I pleased, wear what I liked, get up and leave the table when I liked, and not feel the watchful eye of my mother-in-law ever on me.

Two days later we were in Paris—pleasant, wicked Paris—revelling in a blue sky, and wood fires. One morning Jim received a letter, that was nothing uncommon, but after reading this one, he hastily crumpled it into his pocket, and looked across rather guiltily at me. Now I had fully made up my mind to read *all* his correspondence. Had he not established a right of way through mine, and perused Mona's and Posie's and Toosie Maxwell's effusions, and roared over them? so I said at once very firmly:

"What have you got there, Jim? If it's a *billet doux*, be so good as to hand it over for my perusal."

"It's not a billet doux," helping himself to butter as he spoke.

"And it's not a bill," I said, "for it has a square envelope. *Do* let me see it, I know there's something in it about me," holding out my hand entreatingly.

"What put that idea into your head, Mrs. Vanity?"

"Never mind what. I know it is a right idea, so don't be disagreeable, and let me see that letter."

In vain he resisted, when I persisted I would have my own way, so in the end, like an obedient husband, he handed it over, very reluctantly, I will say. It was from grandmamma, and ran as follows:

"DEAR CAPTAIN KARSLAKE,—I have not hitherto had leisure to reply to your polite note, in which you announced your intention of marrying my grand-daughter Miss Le Marchant, I have waited to see if she was *really serious* this time, in case she might change her mind (as previously) at the eleventh hour. She has not done so (unhappily for you) and is now your wife. All I can say is, that I am *sincerely sorry* for you. I know her, and you do not. When all is going smoothly to the outward eye, you may be certain that she is concocting some deadly act of *deceit*, and will one day play you a trick; that will astonish you!—though I cannot say, that any-

thing she would do would ever astonish *me*. She is a cold, self-concentrated, calculating girl: that pretty impulsive Irish manner is all assumed. I give you no dower with her. I believe you are a wealthy man, and don't need it. I give you instead, what will be more useful to you in the long run, a piece of advice—I say to you solemnly, *don't trust her*. I know that the days of curses are gone; that they proverbially come home to roost: but if *any* girl ever deserved to be laid under a ban, it is Ellen, your wife. You will surely have reason to rue the day you linked your fate with hers, and gave her the name of Karslake. She will certainly disgrace it. It is a mere *question of time*. You may think this letter, the maundering of an angry old woman, furious at having her plans upset, and her intelligence ridiculed by a girl of eighteen, but you will find that I am a true prophet. My grand-daughter's future is a matter of complete indifference to me. In conclusion, I have only to repeat to you what I would impress on *all* Ellen's associates—Don't trust her.

"Yours faithfully,
"R. LE MARCHANT."

"She does not take a very sanguine view of your chances of future happiness, does she Jim?" I said, with twinkling eyes, as I came to the end of this pleasant epistle.

"No," he returned fiercely, "and I shall write her back a letter that will astonish her. Why should she have it *all* her own way? That is nothing more or less than a mean, malicious, deliberate libel. I won't stand it. I shall give her a strong hint to leave you and me alone."

"No, no, dear, you will not take any notice. You must not be so vexed. She only wrote that letter to see if she could, as you would express it, 'draw you.' You must 'smoothe from your forehead the furrow of care,' and return to your expression of habitual calm, and I shall put grandmamma's affectionate character of me into the fire."

"No, don't do that, Nellie," jumping up eagerly. "I shall keep it. I shall turn her own weapon against her yet, you will see."

I tossed it over to him, with a joke about its value.

Little did I guess, as I saw him put it carefully into the breast pocket of his coat, that that very letter would prove a deadly weapon in his hand one day, not against grandmamma, but against *me*.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FIRST CLOUD.

"'Tis as easy as lying."

WHEN we returned from leave, we found that the regiment was on the point of being moved to England; so we joined it at Shorncliffe, and took a charming little furnished house in the neighbouring town of Sandgate; and here I had the pleasure of having a home of my own, and being mistress of all I surveyed, for the first time. We had a very comfortable ménage: there was Jim's man Johnson, a treasure of a soldier servant, only that he would oil his hair with an overpowering quantity of Bergamotte; there was my maid, Moss—who was on very friendly terms with the said Johnson—and we had a cook and housemaid besides.

The cobs and T cart were mine now, and came round for my use every afternoon, and I generally went up to camp and took out one of the other ladies of the True Blues, if Jim happened to be on duty. Of course I saw a great deal of Mrs. Evans; she was quite an old friend; and one or two other officers' wives were so charming, that I began to feel quite at home in military life! I looked on at field days with the deepest interest, especially at the True Blues, and more especially at Jim's company. I read over the orders, when Jim was out, made the acquaintance of most of the women of the regiment, and attended the sewing club, where my talent for cutting out and working was quite an acquisition! We gave little dinners—very good little feasts. Our cook was a woman who knew her business, although her temper was "high," and I trembled before her. Johnson was quite an artist in the way of decorating the table, and Jim was a capital host: as for myself, I wore my prettiest frocks, and sang my newest songs, and I have reason to believe that our entertainments were generally considered a success.

We had some very delightful evenings at home. We played chess or bezique, or I played the piano, while Jim smoked, or I worked, whilst he read aloud the latest novel or newest magazine. I was extremely happy. There was not one crumpled rose-leaf in my life. I had not a thought or a secret from Jim (save one); he was not merely my husband, he was my dearest friend. For six whole months not a cloud came over the sky, not a breeze, however gentle, ruffled the waters. It was strange that I heard nothing of my father. He seemed to have forgotten my existence. I had seen nothing of Colonel Kant, he appeared to be able to get unlimited leave. Indeed, it was an open secret that his room was much preferred to his company. But now he was about to rejoin. What was I to do? How could I avoid him?

It is needless to mention that we had not lost sight of Billy Park. Posie and Mona had been spared to us for a month, and had come in for all the best dances, polo, and cricket matches, and had enjoyed themselves immensely. I had paid their travelling expenses, and given them several pretty dresses, out of my own most liberal allowance, for Jim was the most generous of men, and said, "Are you sure you have enough money; don't you want some coin?" So unlike husbands that I had read of! and I used to exclaim at him, and say, "What an extravagant wretch you must think me. Pray where did you derive your ideas of woman's facility for spending cash? Remember I have been used to *sixpence* a week pocket-money."

"If you had married old Bellamy, you would not have been so economical, would you?"

"No," I returned viciously, "I believe I would have squandered his money with both hands, just from sheer spite. Why?" suddenly interrupting myself. "The corner house is let at last. Money is *no* object to whoever is going there!"

"Oh, I believe Kant has taken it," said Jim, coming and looking over my shoulder.

"Not Colonel Kant?" I exclaimed aghast.

"And pray, why not?"

"But he is not married, is he?"

"No, not that I know of!"

"Then, what can he want with a mansion like that, four huge sitting rooms, seven bed-rooms, rent ten guineas a week?"

"Can't say, my love, but if you like I'll ask him?"

"Why can't he live in a hut?"

"Because he is a wealthy man now, and he thinks a house is more comfortable, and better calculated to keep out sun and rain, in which respect I thoroughly agree with him."

"I wish to goodness he had not decided to come and live close to us," I said, turning away irritably.

"He is most anxious to see *you* Nell. The fame of your charms has been noised abroad."

"Well, he won't see me, not if he calls twenty times."

"Oh come, I say Nell!" he expostulated.

"No, I told you I would not meet him, or know him, and I won't," holding my chin very high.

"Remember, my exclusive young friend, that if you are rude to him, and snub him, he will feel it keenly; for he fancies he is a tremendous lady-killer, and, now Colville is away, he will be in command, and he is just the man to take it out of me. He can make it uncommonly hot for *me*."

"I shall not be rude, but I do not wish to know him. I have a reason," and I halted, and became uncomfortably red.

"Have you been hearing any stories about him from the ladies of the regiment?"

I had—several which were not at all to his credit, and here was a capital opening to evade Jim's questions, so I replied, by nodding my head like a mandarin.

"What a strictly correct, prim, little matron it is," said Jim, surveying me with ironical amazement. "Be as proper as you like, Nellie, but for goodness sake don't let Mrs. Grundy carry you too far—be discreet."

I was exceedingly discreet. I gave directions Johnson the day I heard that my *bête noir* was coming, to say that I could see no one, that I was lying down with a bad headache, a dreadful tarradiddle. I was merely sitting in my own room, to be well out of the way, reading a novel, and sunning myself in a delicious bay window. Once when we were out driving, we met

him. I beheld him afar off, and put up my parasol, so that he could not see me. Another time we came across him when we were walking in Folkestone, and I fled into a shop.

Jim expostulated with me *en route* home, but I said, "It's no use, Jim. I won't meet that man, and when I say I won't, I really mean what I say. Now don't be cross! The very sight of his back gives me utter repulsion. In short, Colonel Kant is to *me* what a cat is to Annie Evans. You know she can't stay in a room with one, and if it goes near her, she faints!"

I found a letter awaiting me when I reached home, one that I had been expecting for a good while, I recognised the writing in an instant, as I snatched it from the salver. It was from my father and said:

"DEAR ELLEN,—I am glad to hear you are well and happy. There is some comfort in that, for I am neither. My efforts have been all thrown away, also my time and money. There is nothing for it now, but to fall back on you, and see what effect you will have on K. I am sorry to bring you into this miserable business, and disturb you in your present lotus-eating life; but it is my only chance, and should you ever have children, you will be glad that you did your utmost to clear your family name. It is hard to ask you to give your mind and time and energies away from your own home, and your adoring husband, but your mother and I were as happy once, and it is your duty as a daughter to right me and avenge her. I shall say no more, but to-morrow or next day I shall be in Sandgate and will arrange to see you; meet me somewhere along the Hythe road when Karslake is on duty.

"Your affectionate father.

"*P. S.*—I hope you have never yet met K. face to face, if you have, my plans are ruined."

So the momentous crisis was at hand, when I was to test Colonel Kant's conscience, by appearing before him as one from the dead. My present happy life, was a bad apprenticeship for the task that was expected of me, my feelings on the subject of the cruel injustice done to my father, and all his sufferings, were not so keen as

they had been. I am sorry to say they were dulled by my own domestic bliss.

This conviction was brought home to me, by the letter in my hand, and the words "your mother and I were as happy once." My smouldering zeal kindled up into a fierce blaze, and as I folded up the letter I felt ready to do and dare anything.

"Nellie, you look tired," said Jim, suddenly, "quite pale and fagged. The walk has knocked you up. Let me get you a glass of sherry, or claret—something."

"No, no, I am just going to have my tea," removing my hat, and throwing it on the sofa. "It's rather warm, that's all."

"You look as white as a ghost, all the same, you"—hesitating, "you have not had bad news in that letter, have you?"

"That letter!" scornfully. "What put such an absurd idea into your head. It's only a note." tearing it up hurriedly, lest he might ask to see it, "and now ring for tea, please, and open the windows as wide as they will go. This room is like an oven."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SECOND MILESTONE ON THE HYTHE ROAD.

"Like one that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread."
—COLERIDGE.

A DAY or two after the receipt of that letter from my father, I came suddenly face to face with him in the street (the one long narrow street that runs through Sandgate, and subsequently ascends to the downs). I was walking with Jim, and of course took no notice; but I felt a good deal startled, notwithstanding that this *rencontre* was not wholly unexpected. No one could possibly have recognised Dominick, the stone-breaker, in that well-dressed, well-bred looking, elderly gentleman. He was a handsome man still, though his hair was white and his moustache (he now wore a moustache) was grey; his eyes were very dark, sunken and piercing, and by far the most striking feature in his face. They looked full

into mine, and we passed on the narrow pavement, and that glance spoke whole volumes of warning.

Although that glance was a mere flash, and did not occupy half a second, Jim noticed it, and said in a puzzled tone:—

"I am sure I know that fellow's face! Where *have* I seen him before?"

To this query, I made no reply—far be it from me to assist his memory! Besides, he could not recognise Dominick Kelly without his goggles. Nevertheless the question appeared to exercise his brain to a considerable extent, for he kept on muttering to himself, "Where *have* I seen that face before?"

At length some fishing tackle in a window, distracted his attention. He stopped in front of it, and looked in, then he went into the shop, leaving me outside.

Flies and lines and landing nets, had no attractions for me, and, moreover, my thoughts were very much absorbed in a totally different direction. As I stood gazing abstractedly at hooks and fishing rods, some one (a man) came and looked into the window too—some one in a dark tweed coat, and thrust something quickly into my hand—a bit of paper—said in a low voice "To-morrow," and then lounged on.

I wondered if Jim had noticed anything, for he was in the doorway. There was a look of mingled astonishment and displeasure in his eyes, as they met mine—a look that I had never seen in them before. I felt scarlet with confusion, and tried to hide my flushed face behind my parasol.

"I say, Nellie," he asked, as he joined me, "did that fellow?" looking after my father, "speak to you?"

"Speak," I stammered. "What put such an improper idea into your head? Are people in the habit of speaking to strangers?"

"Can't say; but it looked like it. You must not be hanging about shop-windows by yourself;" he exclaimed, now taking my hand, and placing it on his arm.

It was the hand in which I held the scrap of paper, and, needless to add, I kept my fingers tightly clenched in an almost vice-like grasp. If Jim were to see a bit of it sticking out! If Jim were to read it! And what a

shame it seemed, to hide a secret from him! I was torn between conflicting duties—my duty to my father and my duty to him; and what would he say if he knew that all my hopes and energies, were bent on placing his present commanding officer in the dock, to be tried for his life?

Little, little, did he dream of the tragic thoughts that were covered by my pretty little brown straw bonnet. I was not sorry when we met another married couple from the camp; it gave me an opportunity of secreting my *billet doux* as we changed partners, I walking with the man, Jim with his wife. I was exceedingly glad, that she could not find time to accept my pressing invitation to return with me to five o'clock tea, for I wanted to be alone.

I rushed up to my room the instant I arrived at home, and tore open, and devoured my little note. It said—

"DEAR NELLIE,—Meet me at the second milestone on the Hythe Road to-morrow afternoon, at four o'clock. Do not fail me.—P. D."

But how was I to contrive this? when to-morrow was the day of the great polo match up in camp, and I had long promised myself the pleasure of seeing Jim lead our regimental team to victory. He was Captain; the True Blues were to have a tent and tea and ices for the world and his wife, and more than this, I had agreed to drive two girls up there in the T cart, and chaperon them (though they were both considerably older than I was). How on earth was I to get out of this? How, *how?* I leant my elbows on my dressing-table, and asked myself this most embarrassing question. As I endeavoured to find some answer, Jim looked in and said:

"Hallo Nell! tea is ready, and I want a cup before I go up to camp. You have not got a headache—have you?" coming over and laying his hand anxiously on my shoulder.

"Yes, I have; but I'm coming down: tea will do it good," rising with simulated languor.

"You walked too far in the sun, that was it. You must not let it happen again," placing his hand under my chin, and raising my face, and gazing tenderly into it. I tried to meet his honest eyes, without blushing, but I did not quite succeed. I had told him an untruth,

and was rather a new hand at the business. I had no more a headache than he had; but I saw that in a feigned temporary illness lay my only chance for to-morrow. Poor Jim! How implicitly he believed in me! I felt a wicked and most deceitful girl, as he led me downstairs, insisted on my lying on the sofa, carefully lowered the blinds, put a cushion under my head, and brought me my tea.

Next day I was no better, of course, if anything rather worse, and unable to rise from my bed, and Jim was full of anxiety and solicitude.

The Miss Trotters received a note (penned by him), putting them off, and he even went so far as to suggest that he should stay at home with me, and that a deputy captain might be found for the polo match! Naturally this was not to be thought of!

"As if anyone *could* take your place Jim," I exclaimed impressively. "What nonsense! Think of the folly of disappointing the whole team, simply because I happen to have a headache—I've often had worse (which was most true) and you *must* go."

My whole scheme, I told myself with great trepidation, would fall to the ground then and there, if he did *not*. My feigned headache, my enforced absence from the polo match, my several stories, would all be thrown away! At half-past two, to my great joy, he bade me a tender and lingering farewell, and, mounting his pony, galloped off to the scene of the polo match; and as I heard the clatter of his pony's hoofs turning the corner of our terrace, I sat up—quite myself of course—rang the bell, and informed my maid that "I really felt so much better, that I would get up and dress."

I was not long over my toilet; it was a good two-mile walk to the place of rendezvous, and along a hot dusty road. Dusty! It was like walking on flour. A little after three, I started thickly veiled, dressed in my coolest cotton gown, and carrying my largest parasol. Oh, dear me, what a broiling walk that was! and how nervous I felt, lest passers by in flys and Victorias *en route* to the camp, should recognise Mrs. Karslake trudging along alone on the Hythe Road, amid tropical heat and volumes of dust, deliberately turning her back upon the

game at which her husband's play was one of the chief attractions. My heart beat uncommonly fast, as I recognised people who luckily did not recognise *me*, nor "Shawn," who cantered gaily ahead of me, no longer a red dog, but—thanks to the dust—a sort of dirty white animal!

At last I reached the goal, and found my father there already awaiting me. He praised my punctuality, and said—"You look hot and tired, Ellen. I'm sorry I have brought you so far; but it was *safer*. Come along into this cool narrow lane; there's a log, you can sit on it and rest, and meanwhile listen to me, whilst I talk to you most seriously."

"Oh, father, if you knew the dreadful stories I have had to tell," I said, fanning myself with my handkerchief, "about getting away. It seems so unfair not to tell Jim. You must allow me to tell Jim," I urged entreatingly. "Please do let him into the secret. He will help us—I *know* he will—and he is so clever."

"Tell him if you like; but it will be fatal to my plans, and in case of your repeating *one* single word of what you know, you and I part for ever: I may find some one else, who will be guided by my wish, by my commands, by what alone will lead to success—*silence*. Of course I may not discover such a person; the chances are, that when my only child goes against me, a stranger will do the same."

His voice, as he spoke, was hard and bitter, and cut me to the heart. I could scarcely restrain my tears.

"Father," I exclaimed, "would you not trust Jim?"

"I now trust, no one. I've had a lesson for life. I am a wise man. I know the worth of *friends*—of one's nearest relations—aye, of one's own mother! Who stuck to me when I was down? Not one, and now that I have a chance—a very small one, but still a chance—of eventually vindicating my innocence, my own daughter would extinguish it for the mere sentimental consideration of unbosoming herself to a man called Jim! a brother officer of the very wretch whom I would hound down. Do you think he would stand by, for the mere credit of his corps, (you little, little know, how strong a feeling *that* is in every soldier's breast), and not lift a finger, as he saw you put a rope round his

brother-officer's neck, and figuratively drag him to the gallows? No; if you can't keep your word and be silent, I have no need of you," standing up and waving me towards the entrance of the lane, as if he were bowing me out of a room.

I gave in: what else could I do?

"Of course, if it must be so, it must," I returned faintly; "but my husband is always *first* with me, remember."

I was standing as I spoke, and I trembled so violently, that I was obliged to lean against a tree, to recover my composure.

"He was not always first, at one time, not so long ago, he was *nothing* to you. *I* am first, and putting me aside, does the black shame that lies on your maiden name give you no concern?"

"My name is his now!" I answered in a low voice. My father was about to utter some angry interruption, but I made a gesture to restrain him, and said: "I will do all I can, all you wish. I can say no more. Half measures in such a case are useless. Make use of me as you will. Do with me what you please, but don't keep me long in *suspense*. I am a bad actress, but believe me, father, for your sake, I will do my very best, and enter into my part, with all my heart, but let me play it *soon*."

"That is precisely what I want you to do. There is not a day to be lost. Any moment Kant may meet you; be introduced to you as Mrs. Karslake, so there is every reason to strike at once. Are you prepared for this?" surveying me sternly.

"Quite," was my laconic reply.

"And your nerve will not fail you at the eleventh hour?" looking at me keenly.

"No," I answered firmly.

"Humph! I am glad you are so certain of yourself. I see you have the Deane spirit. And now I will tell you my plan. You are to appear quite unexpectedly before Kant. You are to display the proofs of his guilt: his coat, the little book, and unless I am *much* mistaken, he will be so completely overwhelmed, that he will make a full confession. He will play our game;

he will be so terrified, and so shaken, that he will place himself in our power, and he will jump at the conclusion, that the law has him at last."

"But how, and when am I to see him?"

"Oh leave all that to *me*. I'll arrange every detail. When all is ready, I shall summon you at the eleventh hour, so that you will have no time for tremors; and remember that I rely upon your word, to obey the summons without delay."

"You may rely on me," I said rising as I spoke, "and now if you have no more to say, I really must be getting back. Jim thinks I am in bed. You cannot imagine the stories I have told, and the manœuvres I have gone through, to get here at all. I do hate deceiving him. I feel so small, and mean."

"If all goes well, the day will come when I can go to your house openly, and claim you as my daughter Ellen, and you will not grudge the little subterfuges, or white lies, that have tended to bring about such a result. I will walk part of the way back with you: as far at least as I dare," and he did accompany me along a goodly stretch of that flat, hot, white road.

Oh, how thankful I was to enter my own cool little drawing-room once more! I glanced nervously at the clock, as I threw myself into the nearest chair. It wanted about five minutes to six, another moment, and I heard quick steps running up the stairs; the door was thrown open and Jim entered in full polo costume, scarlet and white coat, boots and breeches, and little red cap.

"So I hear you are up," he said eagerly. "But," surveying me in great amazement, when his eyes had become accustomed to the darkened room (for the blinds had been lowered to keep out the blazing sun), "you don't mean to tell me Nell, that you have been *out?*"

"Yes; I, I—thought as my head was better, that a little fresh air and a short stroll, would do me good."

"A little fresh air!! Why you look as if you had been for miles. A short stroll," his eyes suddenly fastening on my unlucky shoes, which were fully displayed, and as white as any miller's! "Fred Bingham told me that he had seen you posting along the Hythe road, in all the heat of the sun. I told Fred that his

eyes had played him false, for once in his life, as to my certain knowledge you happened to be in bed, with a splitting headache, and that you were awfully cut up at missing the polo match. But perhaps *I* was wrong and Fred was right?" he asked with a curious twitch at the corners of his mouth. He appeared to be waiting for some reply, and for a few seconds, I could think of no plausible answer.

I stammered and coloured, and at last said something about having "walked on further than I intended."

"If you wanted air and exercise, why did you not have out the cobs, and drive up to the match?" he asked, with rising wrath.

But again silence fell between us, and this time a very painful silence. I could find no appropriate reply. I was tired, hot, frightened, and cross, so I merely took off my hat and pushed my hands up through my curly hair, and stared at Jim vacantly.

"I believe," he said, at last, "that you had a reason for your walk, that you are afraid to reveal to me! What was it?" turning on me a face as white as death.

"Jim," I said, suddenly starting up, and putting both my hands on his shoulders, "it is not *possible*—no, not possible, that you could be jealous and angry, and look at me like this, just because I was so dull here all by myself, and not inclined for the bother of dressing and driving up to camp, and went for a turn on the Hythe road, and you become quite tragic and demand the —reason! Now Jim dear," looking up into his rather stern face, with a smile, for I could not bear him to be angry with me, "is it not all very silly? are you not glad that no one heard you?"

"You are a rare special pleader, Nell, that I will say; and you certainly make it all sound silly enough," stooping and kissing me as he spoke; "but on the other hand, listen to my side of the story. You profess to be wild to see me lead our team to victory. You have taken more interest in the match than most; you have barely missed a practice, and when to-day, of *all* days, I leave you almost half dead with a headache, and heartbroken with disappointment, I go reluctantly up to the match, and after the first goal has been taken, a

fellow comes up, and tells me that he had seen you nearly two miles out on the Hythe road in all the dust, and I promptly jump down his throat."

"But alone, jealous Jim! walking *alone*."

"Yes, but my clever Nellie, you might have been walking to *meet* some one," but he said it in jest, and pinched my cheek, as he made this unpleasantly acute suggestion.

"And you won of course," I said, anxious to turn the conversation into any other channel.

"We did, but not so much of *course*, madam, we had a regular tussle, and only won by one goal. It was a tremendously exciting game. I wish you had been there. Landsell and Carew played up well."

"And who carried the ball in between the flags, and the team to victory?"

"I did, I believe," he answered modestly, "but it was all luck. I raced Hackett for the ball, and Fireworks had the legs of his pony. We were almost locked together, half-way down the ground, but in the end I got hold of the ball, and drove it home. There was great cheering, and I came straight off to tell you. I did not even wait for a peg. Annie Evans is coming down to see you to-morrow morning. She is in an awful state of mind, for fear you won't be able to go to our ball on Wednesday, but you will, won't you?"

"Of course, I'm quite well," I answered unguardedly.

"Thoroughly set up, by that *walk* of yours!" still harking back in that unlucky adventure. "Don't pretend you have a headache on Wednesday, whatever you do, for you have to receive all the guests, and that's a serious business, Mrs. K."

"I—*I* receive the guests, nonsense. What are you thinking about?"

"Yes, Annie is not going, mourning you know—and as I am next senior married officer to Evans, you will be the hostess. Won't you be proud?"

"But you will be the host."

"Not I. Colonel Kant will be your coadjutor, of course, and by the way I hear he is very seedy. He was not up there this afternoon, and generally he is in his element at polo, doing the agreeable to all the ladies, and sunning himself in the smiles of beauty."

"What a cruel disappointment for all the ladies," I remarked contemptuously. "I am sure it completely spoiled their afternoon."

"They will see him, and he will see *you* on Wednesday night," returned Jim with a nod.

"Yes, I suppose there is no help for it," I rejoined moodily, and here the entrance of Johnson with my very late afternoon tea, put an end to our conversation.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A SENSITIVE, TENDER-HEARTED MAN.

"One that may smile and smile, and be a villain."

A FEW days after the polo match, I received another note from my father. Jim was not present when it arrived, so I was not put to any straits to conceal it. It said:—

"DEAR ELLEN,—The grand *coup* I had intended has failed. I find that K. must meet you before my plans are ripe. He will of course be present at your regimental ball, and you also. You cannot go on making excuse after excuse. It will only excite suspicion, so you must dissemble, and be very agreeable. Attract him, dance with him, lure him into security, and then I shall lay my hand upon him. Your extraordinary resemblance to your mother will naturally startle him most painfully, but do not appear to notice it. This ball has thrown out all my schemes, but they will be successful yet."

The following day was that of the ball. Jim was unusually and ridiculously anxious, about my appearance, but he was apparently satisfied, when he beheld me descending the stairs, after a whole hour spent in Moss's hands. My gown was white, and the only color about me was my enormous bouquet of dark red roses. Of course being hostess, I was bound to be the earliest arrival, and we were soon *en route* for the ball in our snug little brougham. The mess room presented a truly imposing spectacle; the walls were covered with arms and trophies, arranged with great taste; mirrors were

inserted at intervals and framed with real flowers, two fountains of scent played at the end of the room, in a kind of bower of palms and ferns; and coloured light fell becomingly on piled up blocks of ice, arranged with moss in a sort of grotto, with the charitable intention of cooling the atmosphere. The ante-room was transformed, the walls were clothed with tiger skins, and other trophies, and the wonderful regimental racing cups were well to the fore. Here I was to take my stand, and shake hands with the company as they filed into the ball room. I was early, the first lady to arrive, but nearly all the officers had appeared, and formed a group around me, some talking of the polo match, some of the floor and some of the decorations. As I stood thus, holding a kind of preliminary "at home," Colonel Kant, glass in eye, and like the rest, in mess dress, strolled in, in a languid "Monarch of all I survey" manner. His eyes—for I was watching him—took in the group in general, then me in particular. He halted suddenly and became of a livid ashen colour, as he noted my presence. I do not know what wild speech was trembling on his tongue. Once or twice he seemed to me to try to speak, and failed. At length Jim, who had not, like me, been prepared for all this agitation, said, "You look ill, sir. Can I get you anything?"

"No, no," shaking his head, and supporting himself by the back of a chair, "a spasm; it is gone now. It was nothing," gazing at me fixedly.

"Then let me introduce you to my wife. Nellie," to me, "this is Colonel Kant."

Colonel Kant muttered something almost inaudible about "delight," and I am sure to discover that I was no guest from the other world, but a creature of flesh and blood, *did* delight him immensely.

I saw him take out his handkerchief, and wipe away the big beads of perspiration that stood upon his forehead—a weight seemed lifted from his mind.

"So sorry, Mrs. Karslake," coming close to me as he spoke, his cruel mouth puckered into a formal and ghastly smile, "that I have not had *this* pleasure before."

"Ah, yes," I rejoined, scarcely knowing what to say, "I was indisposed when you called." This was not

what Mark Twain would call a "stretcher." I was indisposed to see him, to put the case in plain words.

"Shall we take a little turn through the rooms before the company arrive?" he continued, offering me his arm. Of course, I was obliged to accept it, and was led away to look at the gorgeous supper rooms, to inspect the dozen bowers for flirtation, and to give my candid opinion of the selection of dance music, leaving Jim behind, gnawing his moustache, and looking rather puzzled, and not precisely pleased. We talked of the heat of the weather, of the dust of Shorncliffe, of the crowded Lees at Folkestone, and then he burst out impetuously:

"Mrs. Karslake, of course *you* can't know it, but you are the living image of a lady I once knew who is dead. You cannot think what a shock you gave me just now."

I could readily comprehend it, but said nothing.

"Now that I come to look at you attentively," gazing into my face with unnecessarily close inspection, "of course I see a difference. You are younger, fairer, handsomer, but I give you my word of honour, that for a moment I believed it was herself!"

"Yes, I thought you looked rather frightened at something," I answered rashly.

"Frightened!" indignantly; "no, moved and agitated. My dear Mrs. Karslake, you have *no* idea what a sensitive, tender-hearted man I am. You would be surprised if you could realise my feelings, and know how the memory of long ago, is ever present with me—painfully so at times."

I could well believe it, but not in the sense *he* meant, the sentimental hypocrite.

"You will, I hope, honour me with a dance?" extending his hand for my programme.

I bowed my head.

"What may I have?"

"Oh, a square dance," I replied indifferently.

"Only a square dance! Oh Mrs. Karslake, you don't mean to say that Karslake is jealous?"

"No, certainly not," flushing with anger. "You need not have the square dance unless you like."

Whereupon he hastened to assure me that half a loaf was better than no bread, and that he would look for-

ward to this particular dance, as one of the proudest moments of his existence.

"Don't talk nonsense," I said brusquely. "I detest nonsense."

"No, I am not talking nonsense, 'pon my word. Why should I not be proud, when I shall be dancing with the belle of the evening."

This was pretty well after after a quarter of an hour's acquaintance. I shrugged my shoulders, and said very bluntly:

"I dislike this kind of conversation. Let us return to the ante-room. I hear carriages coming."

"You must not be angry with me, dear Mrs. Karslake! You are one of us you know. We are all like one family in the True Blues."

"And who is the head of it?" I enquired as I strolled back.

"Colonel Colville, when he is here. At present *I* am his inefficient substitute. We need not separate, you know. We stand side by side. You take the place of Mrs. Kant—was there such a person—would that there was, were she like her deputy. However, for the next half hour, I shall imagine that you belong to me, and I to you!"

"If you continue to talk such utter folly," I returned without hesitation, "I shall go and dance and amuse myself, and leave you to receive your guests alone! and play both host and hostess."

"I like to make you angry," returned this odious person, with unabashed effrontery. "You look superb when your eyes sparkle."

No wonder! I said to myself, that he was disliked by the officers, and loathed by the ladies of the regiment. The guests came in crowds, and for a long time I stood shaking hands, smiling society smiles, and saying civil little things; it was past eleven o'clock when I was free to go and dance and amuse myself, but I could not really enjoy the ball, although I was young and well dressed, and danced with Jim, who danced divinely. Colonel Kant was the Mordecai in my gateway, whose presence spoiled all. As we paused for breath, during a weird, wailing waltz, I watched him across the room saying all manner of stupid things to a stout lady in

amber satin (who enjoyed it). He was surely far more like an Italian brigand, than a field officer in a smart English regiment! or he would make an ideal conspirator, with the orthodox slouched hat and cloak. His nose had a cruel hook in its shape, the ends of his moustache had a malignant downward bend, ditto the corners of his narrow glittering eyes, and yet his features were regular, his hair and moustache of the traditional raven blackness, and no doubt some people (himself included) considered him a decidedly handsome man. His chest, shoulders, and arms were well enough, but his legs left much to be desired. They had a shrivelled, meagre look; the very legs for an assassin or a bandit. Jim had doubtless been watching me keenly, as I had been watching his commanding officer; for, when at last I withdrew my eyes, they were met by his, and he said in a not very genial tone, and with anything but a sweet expression: "After all your affectation of antipathy, you and Kant seem to have hit it off uncommonly well."

"Of course, now that I know him, I cannot be rude to him or snub him, much as I should like to do both. I am civil to him for *your* sake," I returned, with great presence of mind. "'He,' as you once remarked, 'might make it rather hot for you,' so I shall be polite to him, only in *your* interests, remember."

"Polite to him in *my* interests," echoed Jim, pulling his moustache meditatively. "Well, don't let your anxiety for me, carry you too far. It does not do for a woman to be too polite to him. Give him an inch, he takes an ell—what am I saying? twenty ells."

No need to assure me of this.

"Come along," I said. "Do not let us waste our time discussing him. Let us make the most of this delicious waltz."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SOMETHING QUEER ABOUT THE FAMILY.

"Cry murder in the market place, and each
Will turn upon his neighbour's anxious eyes
That ask, art thou the man?"

WHEN the very last note of the waltz had died away, we followed the tide of dancers who were setting toward

the tea room, but ere we reached it, Jim was accosted by a brother officer, who button-holed him eagerly, and said something in a low tone, adding aloud: "You are the best person to see to it, and I'll look after Mrs. Karslake."

"Not at all," I exclaimed; "recollect that I am not a stranger. Go away both of you, and I'll sit here," pointing to a window seat, "until you have quite done with Jim, and he can fetch me."

"You are sure you won't mind, Nell; it's something about the supper. I won't be five minutes."

"Not at all, Ishall be glad of a rest," I returned, seating myself in the window seat, and opening my fan as I spoke.

"Don't waste any more time—but go," and they took me at my word, and went.

I sat there for a few minutes quite alone. The passage I was in, was a bye one, not familiar to strangers, who passed to the tea room through another door; a verandah ran all round the mess house, and just outside the window, in which I was reposing, there seemed to be a sofa, and that sofa occupied by two persons, a lady and gentleman. At first I was not thinking of them, and his low mutterings, and her affected little laugh, made no impression. I was thinking how well Jim looked in his mess dress; and what a good figure he had. What a contrast to bandy-legged Colonel Kant. Stay! was not that Colonel Kant outside, surely I recognised his harsh, rasping voice? He and his companion, were seated immediately below the window, and were quite in the shade, for the verandah was only lit up by irregular streams of light from the ball-room, through one or two open doors, and by the stars. My attention was arrested by hearing, that magnet to everyone's interest—the sound of my own name. It was the lady who uttered it.

"Mrs. Karslake! *so* amused to see her here and looking prettier than ever."

"Amused," echoed her companion; "what makes you say that?"

"Don't you know about her?" giggling, as she spoke. At this juncture, no one knows better than myself, that I ought to have got up, and moved away or coughed, or put my head out of the window, and said:

"Dear lady I am listening to you, pray deal gently with my character," but I sat perfectly still and made no sign. I was as anxious to hear her little say, as Colonel Kant himself. I knew that listeners never heard any good of themselves, and was prepared for the worst; but what form would the worst take? Was she about to tell him, that I was Philip Deane's daughter?"

"I know nothing about her," said Colonel Kant, "beyond the agreeable fact, that she is a handsome girl, and that Karslake married her some months ago, and that his family were not pleased at the match. He picked her up in Ireland I believe. I was on leave at the time, and knew nothing about her, as I said before. Pray enlighten my ignorance."

"Picked her up in Ireland! surely not. Does she give you the idea of a girl from the wilds of the West? She is English to the tips of her fingers, a Londoner. Look at her air, and manners, and the easy style in which she received your guests. She is no newly canght Hibernian, believe *me*."

"At any rate I know that Karslake married her over there, but I don't know where he met her, or who she was. In fact, I was not interested, but now that I have seen her it is another thing, and I come to you for information."

"You remember hearing of how that rich Mr. Bellamy was jilted," began the lady in a tone of easy narration. "How he was actually waiting in the church, and the bride never appeared; in fact absconded, and made him the laughing-stock of every club in London. They say he was ready to burn her old grandmother before he rushed abroad."

"Oh, by Jove, yes, I should think so, but serve him right for wanting to marry a girl who was forty years his junior."

"Oh, I don't know about that. He had forty thousand a year, and many a girl would have accepted him."

"Ah, perhaps so, but about Mrs. Karslake. Don't let us wander from pretty Mrs. Karslake, whatever we do!"

"Oh, haven't I told you? Why *she* was the girl who ran away—she was the missing bride—the talk of London for one whole day."

"You don't say so," he exclaimed, in evident astonishment.

"Yes, but I do say so. She was a Miss Le Marchant who lived with her grandmother, a wicked, worldly old woman, who made the match. The girl was immensely admired, and her prudent grandmother made hay while the sun shone, and secured the best match of the season, in point of money, but the girl hated it, any one could see that. I rather admired her for running away. I suppose it was her only chance of escape. There was something queer about the family too; I forget what—stay—let me *think*——" my heart throbbed madly as I listened—"I believe it was insanity."

"So you are here still," said Jim. "I am awfully sorry to have left you for so long, Nell, but there are a lot of girls without partners sitting round the walls looking like any number of Peris at the gates of Paradise. It's not our fault—one lady here has actually brought *seven* girls instead of her two sons, and another has chaperoned five! It's very hard lines, for men are scarce, and most of those here are too lazy to dance. I shall have to do double duty, but I had intended dancing with no one but yourself."

"Very sweet of you, dear, but I won't be selfish, I am going to dance every dance, and I am engaged for the next," looking at my programme.

"Let me see," taking it out of my hand. "Oh, so you are going to dance with Kant, are you?" he murmured dubiously.

"Only a square," I returned soothingly.

"Yes, I would not have allowed you to dance anything else with him," frowning as he spoke.

"Jim!"

"Yes, you may say 'Jim' in any tone you please; but it would make no difference. I don't care about Kant; none of us do. I know him well, you pretty little innocent, and you do not—and in short, he would not be a profitable study."

Number 14 was a set of Lancers that I was to figure in as Colonel Kant's partner, and when "Trial by Jury" struck up, he came to where I was sitting, and making me a low obeisance, said:

"Our dance at *last*, Mrs. Karslake," crooking his elbow as he spoke and leading me away.

I could discern by various subtle signs, that since my companion knew more about me, and had heard the story of my escapade in London, I had ascended many degrees in his estimation. I was no longer a mere Irish nobody, having an unpleasant resemblance that grated on his sensibilities, despite my pretty face. I was a celebrity in my way! The mere fact of having been engaged to Mr. Bellamy—a notorious connoisseur of beauty—gave me a sort of "cachet" in his eye, not to speak of the éclat which surrounded me, in consequence of my having spurned a millionaire, in spite of his taste in horses and in diamonds! I was sharp enough in some ways, and read all this as well as various other disagreeable things, in Colonel Kant's narrow, black eyes, as he stood beside me, scanning me critically and pouring into my ear volleys of hateful compliments. I tried to be rude, and did my very best to be brusque, but apparently it only added additional piquancy to my attractions in his opinion. He laughed heartily, a detestable, mirthless laugh, at all my sharp speeches.

"You need not repeat that," I returned, *àpropos* of a most laboured tribute to my charms. "I am quite tired of the subject. I did not make my own face, so why should I be vain? but I know that I am pretty."

"Of course Jim tells you that every day," he responded with an evil leer.

"Never mind what he tells me, it is your turn to advance please, the lady opposite is waiting for you." As he made his steps, and bow, and backed, and sidled to and fro, I watched him narrowly. I could hardly bear to think that I was dancing with a *murderer*—for such he surely was—I could not realise it, which was fortunate. This rather bent figure, in gorgeous uniform, the host of the evening, who was now laying his hand upon his heart, and bowing profoundly to his *vis-à-vis* (a countess), could *he* be the assassin who had committed that awful deed on the bleak, boggy track beside the Vann, twenty long years ago?

I could scarcely believe it. This brilliant scene, lit up by hundreds of lights, filled by the brave and the fair, in their gayest garb, filled too with the jovial strains of merry popular airs (as performed by our excellent

string band) and by an undercurrent of cheery male and female voices, was not the place in which to contemplate that other picture, with its low hovels, its black expanse of peat, its sweeping winds, with their dreary desolate moan, across thousands of acres of bog, or of those horrible holes like open yawning graves, filled up with water of inky blackness, in one of which *it* had been found. These unseasonable thoughts flashed like lightning through my mind; and as Colonel Kant stepped back to take my hand, an irrepressible shudder shook me from head to foot.

"What is the matter?" he inquired, tenderly pressing my fingers. "You look quite white, and frightened. You don't feel faint do you?"

"It's nothing, nothing," I returned, snatching my hand away. "I can stand alone, thank you. I daresay it was the goose walking over my grave. Pray do not be alarmed on my account, I am perfectly well."

"Why do you drag your hand away?" he asked in an injured tone.

"Because I hate people to hold my hand: but never mind me. Pray tell me something about that pretty girl opposite in pale blue."

"Pretty, you call her. Ah, Mrs. Karslake! Where are your eyes?" arching his peaked eyebrows.

"Where are your own?"

"I have none for any one but yourself."

There was simplicity and directness about this statement that fairly took away my breath. I stared at him in angry silence, a stare that was intended for a first class imitation of one of grandmamma's most warranted "freezing" glances, and turned my head away in a pointed manner.

"You are vexed, dear Mrs. Karslake! Forgive me, how unlucky I am! I did not mean to offend you."

"Then please be so good as to attend to the Lancers, and leave personalities out of the question," I rejoined, very stiffly.

"You are not implacable are you?" he enquired playfully.

"Yes, I am," I returned in the utmost good faith. He smiled a ridiculous, incredulous smile, and then

changed the subject, by plunging into regimental matters. I believe he took a malignant pleasure in arousing my worst fears. He talked genially of Egypt, and the immediate prospect of active service up the Nile, in which the regiment was bound to take part. Jim had kept this very unpleasant contingency well in the background, and I need not say that I now hearkened to my partner with beating heart, and breathless interest.

"Did you not know, that we were next on the roster for foreign service?" he enquired confidentially.

"I knew we might go in a year or two."

"A year or two! We are bound to go in a couple of months. We *may* go in a couple of weeks. We are up to our full strength, and in case of a sudden order, are ready to embark at once. Foreign service is the deuce for a married man. What will Karslake do—sell out?"

"Do you mean to imply that he is a coward?" I asked angrily.

"No, no, dear Mrs. Karslake, you take me up so sharply! You know I have the highest opinion of Jim" (more than he has of you, I said to myself). Of cholera, fever, war, and wounds, my companion now discoursed fluently; of the *large* percentage of officers who were invariably killed; of the ferocity of the Mahdi's troops, the tortures they inflicted on the wounded, the horrors of thirst, the horrors of war!

"You have quite spoiled my evening, telling me of all these dreadful things," I said, as I accompanied him reluctantly into the ante-room, there to remain till the strains of the next dance released me. I refused to go to the supper room, or to be lured into a seat in the dim verandah. No, I sat bolt upright, at one side of a small table, whilst my partner reclined opposite, and leant his head on his hand, and looked at me admiringly.

"Why won't you come in and have a jolly little *tête-à-tête* supper with me? Soup, plovers' eggs, apricots, and champagne. I have done my *duty* supper with Lady Marigold, and now let me do my pleasure supper with you."

"Thank you, no. I am going in with Jim by and bye. When do you think the regiment may be ordered off?"

"Oh, I cannot say, and perhaps we shall go to Malta first. You would be charmed with Valetta, capital opera, plenty of picnics, and no end of balls. I used to be very fond of dancing, but I am getting too old and stiff now—" He paused, as if expecting me to repudiate this statement, but I merely turned one of my bangles on my wrist, and said:

"If you don't dance, you can always fall back on the whist room."

"I am not *quite* an old fogy *yet*, thank you," acrimoniously, "and I don't play cards."

"Do you not? not *now* you mean," I returned with a significant smile.

"Not now, or ever?"

"What! not when you were quartered at Drumdear, with that very gambling regiment, the 25th Hussars? I was told that you played almost night and day."

Colonel Kant, who had been fiddling with a paper-cutter, laid it slowly down, and looked at me suspiciously.

"I don't know what you are talking about," he said. "I was at Drumdear, a filthy hole, once, for a few weeks, twenty years ago, but I never touched a card." (Shades of Annanias and Sapphira hear him?) "But I cannot tell you how deeply honoured and flattered I am, to think that Mrs. Karslake has been making enquiries about *me*," he concluded, with ferocious sarcasm.

"I am merely retailing a bit of ordinary hearsay; nothing to make you vain," I replied, in my most off-hand manner.

"Have you been living near Drumdear recently?"

"Yes, I have."

"With whom were you staying?" he inquired with laboured carelessness.

"With cousins," I responded laconically, and with the impenetrability of an Indian idol. He looked baffled, but nevertheless returned to the charge.

"How could you have heard about *me?* It is more than twenty years since I was in Ireland—till the other day."

"In a small place where there are few events, one great event is long remembered. The 25th Hussars are not forgotten yet—Was there not a dreadful tragedy?" I said, suddenly leaning towards him, and

looking straight into his eyes, over the top of my fan. "There was an officer who was horribly murdered, and thrown into a bog hole.—The body was found after several weeks. Murder always will out, will it not?"

The fan I held before me, shading all but my eyes, was scarcely whiter than Colonel Kant's face, and never before on human countenance had I beheld an expression at all resembling his—a glance of desperate, guilty fear.

"Yes, yes, yes," recoiling in his chair, "that is an old story now. We need not refer to it. I was there."

"What, at the murder?" dropping my voice to a whisper.

"*Mrs. Karslake!*" he exclaimed in a glow of momentary fury. Then, in quite another key: "I am a very sensitive, tender-hearted man, and there are some things that I really cannot discuss—no—not even with *you*."

"Did you ever hear that there was a doubt about the trial," I persisted, in a confidential tone, "and that some people said that the wrong man had suffered for the crime?"

"You must be unusually credulous," he sneered, "to listen to such old wives' tales. The Irish peasant is a fine liar! The wrong people are *never* convicted in the nineteenth century."

"Are they not?" I enquired innocently. "I am so glad to hear you say so."

"Yes, any sensible man will tell you the same, and about that—affair—My dear Mrs. Karslake, *who* has been telling you such nonsense? I am quite curious to know?" and he looked at me with a significant glitter in his narrow, black eyes.

"Only common people, peasants, as you say, stone breakers, and bog trotters."

"You must have been hard up for society?"

"I was rather," I answered placidly.

After this admission, the conversation flagged, visibly. How old and grey and withered he looked! How fiercely suspicious was his glance; how nervous and forced his laugh! I had enjoyed quite sufficient of his company, and possibly he had found mine less agreeable

than he anticipated, for when Jim came to take me in to supper, he made no serious remonstrance, and I subsequently noticed him in our vicinity, quaffing a tumbler full of champagne, and watching me stealthily—Why?

I for one, was not sorry when the ball was over, when the last lady guest had been shawled and cloaked, and the daylight came stealing over the sea, and I was at liberty to go home.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

"Thou sure and firm-set earth
Hear not my steps which way they walk, for fear
Thy very stones prate of my whereabouts."

THE next day my partner at the supper table called and was admitted. Now that I knew him there was no use in saying "not at home." Alas! now that I knew him, I saw a great deal too much of him! At tennis parties, cricket matches, or polo, he always came and literally and figuratively sat at my feet. Did I walk on the Lees at Folkestone, he was sure to be there, and to join us. Wherever I went, he was my shadow. There was no use in snubbing him, nor telling Jim *how* I loathed and detested him. Jim was unreasonably angry. Jim was jealous. How miserable I was between two fires! Goaded on by my father (who at times seemed totally to forget that I was a married woman, and had a husband to account to, and he, a gentleman of rather fiery temper) to keep on terms for the present with his destroyer, that he might the more easily reach him—twitted by Jim with "encouraging that fellow Kant," and liking his most marked attentions. Between these two opposing influences, I was at times nearly beside myself. One day, so stung was I by Jim's little sarcastic speeches, that (we were sitting at dessert after dinner) I rose up and flung my serviette on the ground passionately, and said:

"Enough of this, Jim! If you like, I will go down on my knees this very minute with the Bible in my hand, and swear to you that this earth holds no one I abhor like Colonel Kant! Will you believe me then?"

"But what would be the good of that?" he returned with exasperating coolness. "Deeds not words, are the coin for my money. Next time we meet, and he comes bowing up to you, you will smile and look as pleased as if his was but the one beloved face on earth, and that was shining on you."

"I never smile at him," I cried fiercely.

"You must give him some encouragement that answers as well," he remarked in a tone I had never heard from him before.

"None! No one but a madly jealous man, would dream at hinting at such a thing. I wonder you have such a small mind, I really *do* wonder at you."

"I wonder too. I won't deny that I am jealous, it's my nature, I suppose. All or nothing, is my motto. I candidly confess that I grudge every look or smile that you bestow upon another fellow. I know I'm a fool, but it's because I am so idiotically fond of you! Now, as far as you are concerned, I might flirt till I was bald or grey, with other women, and you would not care a straw, in fact you would be rather pleased to see me so well amused. That's your disposition; the other is unfortunately mine. One can't help the natural bent of one's character. As the deformed man said when they tried to straighten his leg, after a fall out hunting, I was *born* so."

"And so was I," I cried, flinging my arms round his neck, with a sudden force that took him quite aback. "If I saw you flirting ever, ever so little with another woman, I should feel inclined to kill her, and it would break my heart. You must never do it, never, never, for it's just the one thing that I could not bear."

"But I'm to bear it."

"No, and you know you are not in earnest! Would any sane creature compare that miserable man with his evil face and bandy legs to you?"

"I really can't say. Women have queer tastes! However, we will say no more about it. I'm a horrible ill-tempered fellow, Nell, am I not?" stroking my hair. "And you are very sorry you ever saw me, much less were such a little goose as to marry me, is not that true?"

"You know it is not, and only for one thing—in which you have no concern—I would be the happiest girl in England—in the world."

"I suppose the one thing in which I have no concern, is the sad misfit Madame Paulette has made of your new dress. But never mind that. Get another. Don't let it prey on your mind," now smiling quite like himself.

Little, little did he guess at what was preying on my mind.

I accepted his version of my trouble with an hysterical laugh, and said that "I supposed a new gown was the only way out of it," and we kissed then and there, and made friends.

The following morning I was sitting alone on the beach, basking in the September sunshine, with a novel on my lap, and a large parasol over my head. But I was not reading. I was staring dreamily over the bright, glittering, hypocritical sea, smooth as glass at present, my eyes not really seeing anything, my thoughts occupied with very gloomy matters. A shadow between me and the sun, and the vision of a pair of legs, standing close to me, caused me to look up, and I saw my father, looking sterner, sadder, and more inflexible than ever. He came and sat down boldly beside me and said, "Ellen, I waited till I knew that the coast was clear. Karslake has gone up to camp, and this boat here effectually conceals me from prying eyes. I have a great deal to say to you that I cannot write. Matters must be settled out of hand."

"Yes," I acquiesced tremulously.

"I have been prowling round and picking up a good many pieces of information. The True Blues are likely to go on foreign service, sooner than they think. There is a big guest night to-night, but that fellow won't be at it. He is sick. I had intended you to have had it all out with him in your own house, but now time is short, very short, and *you* must go to him. Do you understand?"

"Impossible!" I stammered; "utterly impossible!"

"Not at all. You know the plan of the house well, don't you? You went over it when it was vacant. His smoking room or study, or whatever he calls it, is right

in front; the bow-windowed room at the head of the stairs. He sits there all the evening alone, smoking cigarettes, reading vile French novels, and sipping absinthe. You shall steal up after dark, confront him with the proofs, and tell him that he had best confess without further delay——or you will deliver him up to justice. You must frighten him *well*, for your proofs are so meagre, after so many years, that our strongest weapon against him must be his own guilty conscience."

"He has *no* conscience," I said sharply. "Has he not lived a merry life all these years, as if he were the most harmless of mankind? Besides this, I cannot carry out your plan. I will not go to his house. Think of what people will say. Think of Jim! Wait, I shall make an opportunity of seeing him at home. We have waited so long, let us wait a little longer."

"There is no time to lose, I tell you, not an hour. Now, now is my chance, when he is weakened by fever. I must use every advantage that fate gives me. These warm dusky evenings, his hall door is never locked till near midnight; his servants are always out. I shall walk over and see you safely in. Karslake will be away at the mess I know, at this big dinner to the General and staff. Such a chance will not occur again. You must seize it," holding out a neat parcel, "here are the proofs. If you play your part well, and let him suppose that we have the law at our backs, and that it is reaching out its arms to clutch him, he will confess all."

"What and give himself up?"

"Not that; he may give you a written confession of his guilt and fly. I don't ask for more—I don't ask for his life. I only ask to be cleared, and who knows if by this time to-morrow, if you play your cards boldly and well, but I may be a free man. The very idea makes my brain reel!"

"Father," I exclaimed with decision, "if anyone were listening to us, any impartial person, they would say it was a mad project. Why have you left it so long in abeyance? For a month you have done nothing, and now suddenly you say I must run this awful risk. I cannot do it," I said, "cannot go to his house. Think of who he is—and supposing Jim——"

"You need not suppose anything about Jim," he interrupted, with a look in his eye that made me quail. "He will know nothing about it—how can he? I will see you safe there, and safe home. Come, would you fail me at the critical moment? Are you a *coward* in spite of all your boasts? Remember," he added in a softer tone, "I have no one in the whole wide world but *you*."

"If it was anything but that," I said, wringing my hands, "I'm one of those wretched people who are always found out. It will be discovered somehow. I know it. I am sure of it!"

"How can it be discovered?" he demanded, with a frown. "I guarantee you perfect safety. At ten o'clock to-night I shall throw some gravel at your drawing-room window, and you will be ready to accompany me. Why, it is only to the corner of the street; don't forget the parcel. Oh, here are some ladies coming to speak to you and I must go, but I depend on you Nellie, and remember at half-past ten!"

The remainder of that day, was one of the most wretched I had ever spent.

Jim remarked on my pale, haggard appearance, and no wonder. My nerves were completely unstrung, my heart beat like the clapper of a mill, and at every little sound I was ready to jump off my chair. When Jim departed for dinner at the mess, kissing me ere he went, I felt inclined to rush out after him, and tell him everything, despite of my father, but as I stood inactive, I heard the door bang, the clatter of hoofs, and he was gone, and I had nothing now to do, but sit down and wait for the signal. I fetched a long grey cloak to cover my white dress. I laid it and the parcel on a chair beside me, and then I took up a novel and tried to read. What a farce! I tried to work, but my trembling fingers only pricked each other with the needle. Even this sultry night, a night when the heat was almost tropical, I was as cold as ice.

"This sort of thing will never do," I said, beginning to pace the room. "If I cannot carry out my part boldly, bravely, I had best leave it alone."

As I measured the room from end to end, I ran my

thoughts over the whole tragedy. I revived my ebbing courage with a good long look at that black picture, and its presentation to my mind, had an excellent effect.

I was quite ready for anything, when I heard a faint patter of pebbles on the window. I quickly got up, and put on my cloak, drawing the hood over my head, and snatching up the parcel, ran downstairs, opened the hall door, and stepped out into the hot still night.

As I closed the door very gently, I was joined by a figure, and a voice said:

"Punctual as usual, and in the very nick of time. I have watched his man-servant steal away to a public-house. The door is on the latch, he is alone. You can see his shadow on the blind."

"Father," I whispered, "I am going, and in going I'm putting my name, honour and happiness in your hands. Before I go, one last word. Must *I* be the one to denounce him? Would it not come better from you, his victim? Why should you not go in and lay the proof of his guilt before him?"

"Is *this* how you would serve me at the eleventh hour?" he asked, grasping my wrist furiously.

"No, no, I am going.—If there is no other way," I returned steadfastly.

"There *is* no other way. Were I to present myself, he would have me turned out as a burglar, as a felon, as a ticket-of leave man. You forget *that*, now you are different. He cannot turn you out. There are no black marks against your name. He must listen to you, and fear you. Here we are, go in. Be brave, be prudent, be pitiless," pushing open the door as he spoke, "get it over quickly—I will wait outside."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A FORLORN HOPE.

"And dar'st thou then
To beard the lion in his den."

I WAS now in a large hall, lit up by a hanging lamp. I stole through it on tip-toe, and literally flew up the staircase, my shoes making no noise on the thick, deep

carpets. At the first landing were two [redacted] wanted, was the farthest. I cautiously [redacted] handle, and went softly in. He I sought, was [redacted] an easy chair, with his back to the light of a low [redacted] lamp, absorbed in a book, with a yellow paper cover. [redacted] was dressed in a loose black velvet jacket, and trousers [redacted] and wore gorgeous slippers. I noticed all this as I held my breath, standing behind him. For two or three seconds he seemed quite unaware of my presence, so absorbed was he in his study, but my quick breathing made him suddenly look round. When he saw me, he was thunderstruck, but as I pushed back my hood, he sprang up and came toward me with affected gallantry—tempered with amazement.

"This, my dear Mrs. Karslake, is an unexpected honour and pleasure! How lucky for me that a bad touch of fever—all day—prevented my dining at mess. I was thinking of strolling over to see you, but——"

"I wish you *had*," I interrupted. "It would have saved my coming here."

"I hope there is nothing serious the matter?" drawing up an arm-chair for me, but I would not sit down. "You look, er, very strange, as if you had heard bad news!"

"I have heard no bad news recently, but I have come to tell you something that may surprise you, if you ever are surprised."

He sat down and surveyed me with a calm and critical eye. Possibly he thought I had gone mad.

"I am the daughter, the only child of Philip Deane." As I said this, I saw his countenance change, his look of gallantry fade, his eyes blinked quickly, and his lower lip trembled. "You can see that I resemble my mother," I proceeded steadily.

"But good heavens, my dear young lady, what has this got to do with me?"

"Merely that you will comprehend, that I am the natural instrument to bring you to justice."

"She is mad! the unfortunate girl is demented," he said looking at the lamp, with a smile,—but a forced one.

"No, I am perfectly sane. I have proofs that will go

jury that you, Julian Kant, are the
. Sim."

this, he started half out of his chair, and
a foreign oath of frightful import.

o you know *this?*" I inquired, suddenly shaking
the white overcoat. "Murder will out you see."

"Where did you get it?" he asked, completely off his guard.

"Where you hid it after the crime, and such was your state of mind, no wonder that you forgot where you had put it. Many and many a time you searched for it in vain. It was found stuffed into the hollow of a willow, on the border of the bog.

"But why should you suppose that it is mine? What nonsense is this. You are out of your senses," he cried fiercely.

"No more than you are," I returned firmly, "and I have some other things to show you. I have sufficient proofs to hang you. You, who have let my father suffer for your crime, you wretch, you cowardly, wicked villain!"

"These heroics are capital! You would make your fortune on the stage, Mrs. Karslake," he sneered, but his voice shook; his face was livid, his whole attitude rigid, as of one suddenly stricken with some mortal fear.

This did not escape me, and keeping my eyes still intently fastened on his, I slowly produced the cigar case.

"You know this, for your name is on it, and this also," holding out the memorandum book.

The very sight of *this* was conclusive. He sank slowly down into his chair, clutched its two arms, with his yellow twitching fingers, and glared at it, as though it were some awful supernatural spectacle. He made no attempt to speak, but he breathed hard, and his features worked convulsively. Guilt was stamped on every line. Oh, that a Judge and jury could see him *now!*

"You see I hold proofs," I said. "I know all about it, as well as if I had seen you do it with my own eyes. You met that miserable man in that lonely lane, and shot him with the gun he carried. You dragged his dead body into temporary concealment behind some furze bushes, and taking off your blood-stained coat

containing your booty—these—" holding out the I. O. U's—"hid them, and returned at full speed to mess. You lost a stud in the scuffle, which, luckily for you, though found, was lost again. At the dead of night you returned stealthily, and dragged the body to the nearest bog hole, sank it with a stone at its feet. Then you felt at last that you were a free man. Your debts were cancelled. Ruin no longer stared you in the face. There was no need to sell your commission, and your unfortunate scapegoat Philip Deane, bore all the outward burden, and all the consequences of your crime. He was sent to penal servitude, and you, having *no* conscience to disturb you, have been quite happy and prosperous for twenty years; but your lease is out, your days of peace and prosperity are over. Justice, though leaden-footed, overtakes criminals at last. She has but to reach forth her hand and take *you!*"

"Who says so, mad woman?" he screamed.

"I do, and unless you write out a full confession, which alone can save you from the gallows, and then fly the country, I shall not spare you."

I had worked myself up into an inconceivable state of excitement. My words came hurrying over one another, I was panting and breathless when I stopped, but I had said too much, I had spoken too *long*. I had given the man before me time to recover from the shock, time to collect his senses, time to think, to make plans.

He rose unexpectedly, and wrenching the little memorandum book out of my hand, flung it into the fire, for, warm as it was, his foreign blood required more heat, and putting his foot upon it, pressed it down into the heart of the red embers.

I made a desperate dash at it, even with my bare fingers, I would have pulled it out of the flames. It was the hinge on which my whole case hung; my most precious proof of all! I flung myself frantically on my knees, on the rug, and tore and snatched at the fast kindling leaves, but it was of no avail. A man, be he ever so thin and meagre, and bandy-legged, in physique, is stronger than a woman. He bent over me, and held my hands tightly, he gripped them like steel. I dared not scream, and I had the unspeakable agony of behold-

ing my most priceless memorandum book consumed before my eyes. Leaf by leaf it disappeared, and then the binding was licked up by those greedy, speedy flames —and it was all gone!

"Checkmated, you young she-fiend," he said: "I have drawn your sting now. Begone, and do your worst," thrusting my scorched hands from him with a quick, rough jerk—"I *defy* you, you lunatic."

"I shall have the whole case opened up," I panted, rising from my knees as I spoke. "I shall haunt you, and dog you as long as you breathe. I shall bring it home to you yet," gasping out my words, in quick sentences. "I shall never rest as long as I live, or as long as you live, for you did it. You admitted as much."

"Supposing that I did, you cannot touch me," he answered with a look of indescribable triumph, a look that a very devil might have envied.

"You are powerless now, and you know it. You came here to denounce me, and you are utterly defeated. You are now in *my* power! What do you think, the kind people of Sandgate and Shorncliffe will say, when they know that pretty Mrs. Karslake, took advantage of her husband's absence, to honour me with a visit in my own house, at eleven o'clock at night? See what a weapon you have placed in my hands, my beautiful little tigress—and if ever a jealous husband walks this earth, his name is Gervase Karslake! Your mother scorned me, and I punished her. You have deceived me, attacked me, denounced me, you foolish creature, with your wild eyes, and tragedy airs, and proofs. I shall destroy you. I shall make such use of this visit of yours, and turn it to such excellent account, that you will be hounded out of decent society, thrust with horror from your home, and you will spend the remainder of your days in solitary squalor, bitterly rueing the day, you ever attempted to brave Julian Kant."

He paused breathless and wiped his lips.

Yes, he was master of the position now—and with a vengeance. Truly, truly, I had come for wool, and was going home shorn. What chance had I—an impulsive, excitable girl of twenty—against this miscreant, of more than double my age, one hundred times my experience,

and with an inexhaustible fund of villainy to fall back upon, who had not stuck at murder—who would stick at nothing. I stood and stared at him, with doubtless all the hate and loathing I felt for him shining in my angry eyes—and he returned my glance with one of lazy, amused contempt, suddenly changing to one of absolute ferocity.

"Imagine a child like you, thinking she could get the better of a man like me," and he laughed, what a laugh! "You are like your mother, but not half so handsome—and you shall pay dearly for this night's work, for I am subject to attacks and to spasms, and your startling farrago of nonsense will doubtless do me no good." As he spoke, he reached out a long skinny hand, and seized my locket, which hung round my neck by a delicate chain, and giving it a quick, cruel jerk, broke it off, and calmly appropriated my ornament, which he proceeded to open, saying "Ah—er—capital likeness of Karslake, perhaps erring on the side of flattery—I shall declare that you *pressed* it on me as a gage d'amour!" So saying, he slipped it into the pocket of his loose velvet jacket, whilst I stood speechless, aghast at his wickedness.

"The game is up, as you see, and you may as well go," he continued, with a hateful smile.

I could do no good in lingering. I understood that my attempt had failed, had recoiled on myself. I had done my best, I had shaken my bogie in his face, and he had burned it! I had threatened him, and he had laughed at me; stormed—and he had smiled. With shaking hands, I pulled my hood over my face, and went to the door, and as I stood with the handle in my grasp, I said the last word:

"You escape me, and I cannot say that I leave you to your conscience, for you have *none*. But I know that some day, I shall reckon with you yet. Some day, you shall stand in my father's place. Our name will be clear, and yours will be held up to universal execration."

He made no reply to this. I see him now! as I saw him then, standing with one hand on the table, the other on his heart, smiling malignantly and bowing pro-

foundly. I closed the door on the hateful spectacle, and went softly out. I crept half way downstairs, and as I turned the corner, my horrified eyes fell on two officers, who were standing together under the lamp, talking very earnestly in a low voice. They had on forage caps and great coats, and one of them held a long official envelope and a telegram in his hand. The flutter of my dress caused him to look up; it was Mr. Jarvis, and probably something in the amazed expression of his face made his companion turn round—*he was Jim.* At first, I am certain he did not realise that the woman he saw stealing down Colonel Kant's staircase, was me, Nellie, his wife, but after a full minute's steady stare, he grasped that awful fact.

I halted half way down, transfixed with horror, staring at him helplessly, uncertain what to do. I dared not go back, I dared not go forward. Was ever any young woman caught in such a desperate predicament—in such a trap?

At last Jim spoke, in a strange, far away kind of voice:

"You had better come down. I will take you home."

Thus invited, I crept humbly to the foot of the stairs, pulled my hood still further over my face, and without a word, followed him out of the door, down the steps, across the road, and up to our own sitting-room. Oh that I had never left it! I followed my leader, with mechanical steps, precisely as a dog follows its master. He walked straight before me, and never looked back until he had closed the door upon us, in our own drawing-room.

What was he going to do? Was he going to kill me? Frightened as I had been during my *tête à-tête* with Colonel Kant, I was now even more afraid of Jim. I was stricken with very pardonable terror, and trembled like an autumn leaf, as I looked at his countenance, transformed with wrath and scorn, his white face working with passion—a passion too fearful to find the ordinary relief in speech.

He went over and stood by the mantel piece, whilst I removed my gray cloak, laid it on a chair, and waited with a panting heart for the blow to fall—the storm to burst.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

JUDGMENT.

"I would that I were now laid low in my grave,
I am not worth this coil that's made for me."

KING JOHN

AFTER a truly awful silence, he spoke, spoke with a visible effort, and this is what he said:

"I would not have believed it, had I not seen it with my own eyes, no, not if my best friend had sworn it to me with his last breath, for I trusted you too well. Yet I might have known that the daughter of a man who betrayed and murdered a comrade in cold blood, would have—for these things are bred in the bone—but little scruple in betraying her husband!"

He spoke in a hard, concentrated voice. I dared not move. I was already crushed by the agitation and agony of that other terrible interview. I could only listen in silence, and sit as if turned into stone.

"I might have known that a girl so ready and so bold at escaping from one marriage, so quick of resource, so accomplished at inventing excuses, would soon tire of a quiet, hum-drum domestic life like ours. That fable about the headache was, I now see, an excuse to meet him, that apparently and openly expressed abhorrence was a mere blind, and oh, how *blind* I have been! And to wreck her home for such a man of all men!"

Here Jim threw himself into a chair, laid his arms on the table, and buried his head in them. I believe he wept, and let me here assure you, that it is a fearful experience to see a man cry.

Still I sat petrified, I dared not speak. I could not, if I would: the power of articulation had left me. I felt as if I were a spectator, looking on at scenes in my own life—dream scenes, much too terrible to be true. I would awake, and it would all be as before, *this* was nothing but a hideous nightmare.

"I don't know what I am to do with you," he said

at last, in a hoarse voice, staring at me very hard. "I feel half inclined to kill you, and myself, into the bargain!"

As he spoke he stood up and made a quick step towards the door. My very blood ran ice in my veins. I had a natural shrinking from death, and I knew instinctively that he was making for his revolver, but he paused: better thoughts prevailed, and he began to walk about the room talking to himself in broken snatches.

"What have I to live for? My life is ruined. More fool I to trust a woman — another woman. Was not one enough?—but this, this is too awful," suddenly clenching his hands. "*What* can I do to you, you miserable, infatuated, false, wicked creature?" (to me) "I might divorce you, but no, I'd rather die than have my name dragged through the newspapers for the amusement of a gaping public. I'll keep my disgrace to myself, and bear it, if I can. Jarvis will be silent. He and I are the only two. As to Kant himself—" I thought of his threats, and of the locket and shuddered—"I shall kill him, or he shall kill me. I know he is going to send in his papers. We can meet abroad. I will go and see about it now. No time to lose, when we sail so soon."

Without another word, he went out of the room, first taking the key out of the door, and deliberately locking me in. He was absent nearly an hour, and I still sat where he had left me, as rigid as any graven image. It was nearly one o'clock, when I heard his quick footsteps coming across the street in the still night, and then across the hall, and then upstairs.

"Kant is very ill," he said to me, "quite unconscious, in a fit. He is liable to fits. *This* dropped out of his pocket," he added, holding up my locket, with his feelings evidently under difficult restraint. I looked at it and at him, with a gaze of inexpressible, steadfast despair. What was I now, but a leaf, as it were upon the wild waves of fate!

"I thought there were no surprises left for me," he said, "but I was mistaken. I would not have believed that you—abandoned as you are—would actually have bestowed my first gift upon that ruffian."

He looked at me as he spoke, white with hat[illegible] scorn, and fury.

"You do well to say nothing," he added, after [illegible] silence, during which the clock on the mantel-piece [illegible] a cathedral chime, struck half-past one. "Indeed w[illegible] *can* you say? Facts are sufficiently eloquent, they spe[illegible] for you."

"I can say much," I said, "if you will hear me!" Now driven to extremity by the blast of this terrible calamity. I was determined to cast my promise to the winds—I must, or I would go mad. I would tell him *all.*

He looked at me, as I spoke in a low and trembling voice—as if I was some reptile that had been gifted with speech. I rose and made an effort to approach him, but he pushed me rudely, roughly away, saying:

"Keep back. Don't come within yards of me," and he drew away, as if my presence was pollution. I felt a sense of burning humiliation, undeserved, but equally painful and hard to bear.

"Then say whatever you have to say and be quick," he said sharply.

"Appearances are fearfully against me, I know, but—but I am innocent," I faltered in an almost inaudible voice.

"Tell me no more lies," he interposed fiercely. "You have enough to answer for already."

"I *am* innocent. I swear it to you on my knees," I cried suddenly, dropping into that humble posture.

"Spare yourself the trouble! I would not believe you, not—not if it were your dying oath. You offered me the same assurance not later than yesterday, to the bolstering up of your pledge, that he was the man you hated of all men in the world, and yet to-night—at midnight—I find you in his house, creeping downstairs like a thief." He stopped, as if the very words choked him.

"You insult me by your suspicions," I cried, blazing into a brief spark of spirit. "I hate and detest that wicked man more than ever! To clear myself in your eyes I must break faith with one who trusted me—but it is better to do that than to lose my reason—I am in a desperate strait!"

"Go on—go on—get it over, this breach of faith," he

with cutting sharpness. "Why should you not other people as well as *me?* Put us all on the footing!"

paid no attention to this taunt; but clinging to the ck of a chair to steady myself, I said: "My father alive. He did not die. His death was reported by mistake, and I saw him often near Billy Park. He was Dominick, the stone-breaker. He wore those goggles as a disguise, and it was him I went to meet on the Hythe Road."

"Also to-night," interrupted Jim, sternly.

"No—to-night I went to do my duty, to carry out his wishes, and to denounce Colonel Kant, as the real murderer of Mr. Sim."

I spoke pretty steadily, but I was trembling from head to foot.

"You are not merely bad, but you are stark staring *mad*," said Jim, in a tone of sullen surprise.

"I am not. I had proofs—found in a cabin near the spot."

"What proofs?" demanded my stern and merciless judge.

"A coat that Colonel Kant wore, a book in which his losses to Mr. Sim were entered—thousands of pounds—and the only testimony of his gambling debts to Mr. Sim."

"And where are these proofs, as you call them? Show them to me?"

"Alas! I cannot. I took them to that wretch, thinking that the sight of them, that the knowledge of their being in existence would tell upon his fears, but he is too hardened——" and I stopped.

"*So* I should imagine," ironically, "and where are they?"

"He kept them," I returned, in a low voice.

"And the locket too, was that *another* proof?"

"Were you in my place, I would be more generous to you," I stammered, struggling unsuccessfully with a difficulty of utterance. "Say and think what you please, my father is innocent, and all I did, and all I risked, was for his sake."

"Innocent! and yet he was tried, and found guilty and sent across the seas—as innocent as *you* are."

"I accept the comparison—as innocent as I am, and some day our innocence will shine forth like the noon-day sun. I have told you the truth, and nothing but the truth."

"Why did your father not confront Kant himself, if he is the innocent sufferer you make out?"

"Because he is only a ticket-of-leave. He is not on a footing that gives him the chance of speaking man to man."

"And you thought *you* would try what a woman, a young and pretty woman, could do?"

"I did, Jim," I answered imploringly. "Do you, will you believe me—oh! you do—you will—you *must*," I urged passionately.

"No, never again. The whole story is too wildly improbable for Munchausen himself. For brilliant invention you have no equal—your audacity of assertion, unfounded assertion, would make a very Cretan blush. Proofs—you talk of proofs—but produce none. I hate a liar! From this time henceforth, for ever, you and I are strangers, remember that. For the sake of my family, I shall keep this terrible business as quiet as I can—I shall not divorce you."

"Because you cannot!" I interrupted angrily.

"Not divorce you, nor cast you adrift, to drag my name through the mud at your pleasure. I shall leave you under my mother's care, and make a true statement of the whole case to your uncle, Mr. O'Brien. My mother shall be your guardian. Prepare yourself from this day forth, for a life of seclusion, and a career of penance."

"I would ten times rather die than live with her," I exclaimed passionately.

"You can please yourself about *that*, by-and-bye, but live with her you shall. Who else would receive you under their roof? Not your uncle, not your grandmother. Ah, *she* was a faithful prophetess—a wise old woman! I have her letter yet. Every word she wrote has come true. 'When all is going smoothly to the outward eye,' it said, 'you may be certain that she is concocting some deadly act of deceit. You will rue the day you linked your fate with hers.' And most bitterly

do I rue it—but I am responsible for you, as long as I suffer you to bear my name."

"And you—where will you live?"

"The further from you the better, and my wish will soon be gratified. We are under orders for Egypt. We sail on Wednesday. Cheer up, I may be killed, or I may die of fever, and then you will be quite free."

"How dare you speak to me in this way, how dare you taunt me," I said, now trembling with anger. "Do you want me to *hate* you?" I stood clutching the back of the chair, and staring at him fiercely, till a cold, a piercing reaction crept over my burning and excited brain. He was going—going in anger. I could not clear myself, strive as I would. What he had predicted might really occur. Nay, such was my fate, was *sure* to occur! Hate, despise me, loathe me, taunt me as he might, I could not endure to lose him. I was about to do so. I knew I should never see him again. I stretched out my hands in a frenzy of despair. I said, I know not what. I saw him make an angry, and derisive gesture, and then I remember no more. Nature, overwrought by all I had gone through, that never-to-be-forgotten evening, succumbed, and I fell at his feet insensible.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MY MOTHER-IN-LAW.

"My days are in the yellow leaf;
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the canker and the grief
Are mine alone!"

I REMEMBER nothing distinctly for several days. I lay in a darkened room with ice and eau de cologne to my head, and I have vague recollections of hammering sounds betokening packing, as coming from the lower regions, but as my brain cleared, and my mind sprang back to everyday matters, I was aware that I was not alone. I was being watched over by a tall, upright old lady, with a dark, stern countenance; in short, my mother-in-law.

I remained quite still—keenly conscious for a whole

day, with my eyes closed, feigning sleep: in real truth holding a solemn review of all my bitter experiences, staring hard (mentally) into that black cloud that had so cruelly descended on my life, trying to discover if one faint ray of light was visible anywhere? But no, all was darkness—darkness. My father was as far from the fulfilment of his hopes as ever, even though in the mad effort to restore him to his place and name, I had wrecked happiness, and to all appearance — honour. They had gone in vain. That wicked wretch, who had been the ruin of my parents, would as surely destroy me; all who crossed his path seemingly sustained a blight. I had failed to carry out my purpose; if I had even had the satisfaction of knowing that I had succeeded, I could have borne the rest better, but to think that the case was now more hopeless than ever, that I, a miserable girl, had left my good name at that man's mercy for nothing—that I had lost Jim for nothing!

What had I to live for? I lay there asking myself this question, and wishing most fervently that I was dead —(a quiet, easy death, of course. I had no desire to make my exit from the world, by violent means, or by my own hands). Once dead, people might think more tenderly of me. I was so young—young people are generally regretted more acutely than the aged, or middle aged!

As my mind dwelt upon the only pleasant prospect I had to contemplate, to wit, my own death, death of a broken heart, I already saw myself laid out, my hands lightly crossed on my breast, white flowers strewed around me, and beheld Jim weeping over my bier, my innocence proved too late, I felt that I would be thankful to die, to achieve such results! It almost invariably happened that when people were dead, their memories were cleared, at least so I had read in books, and I saw no road, but by death, out of all my misfortunes. Colonel Kant would not clear me (far from it). My father's word went for nothing, and Jim had seen me in Colonel Kant's house with his own eyes. Their testimony was sufficient.

"Asleep still," said a low voice, that was startlingly close to me. I heard no footsteps, and opening my

eyes, I found Mrs. Karslake's hooked nose, within an inch of mine. Perhaps as I lay so very still, she had a vague idea that I was—what I had just been wishing to be—*dead*.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, a little discomposed, "are you better?"

"Yes, thank you," trying to raise my head, but it was like lead, and fell back almost of its own accord upon the pillow.

"Where is Jim?" I asked faintly.

"He left this morning," she returned rather stiffly.

"Left for where?"

"For Malta with the regiment."

"How long have I been here?"

"Three days to-day."

"And have they all gone?"

"All but the women and children. It was a sudden order. They sail from Portsmouth at daybreak to-morrow morning."

I could not speak for some time, there was such a big lump in my throat. Mrs. Karslake walked over to the window, and stood looking out. It was a grey, gusty day. I could see that the wind was blowing the sand before it in clouds. There was not much outside to rivet her attention, and presently she turned round, and was about to leave the room, but I beckoned to her to remain.

"Mrs. Karslake," I said in a low voice, "I suppose Jim has told you about *me*?"

"He has," she returned, very sternly.

"But what he thinks is not true."

She looked at me steadily, and made no answer.

"It is not indeed," I reiterated earnestly.

"Pray don't excite yourself," she returned coldly. "It can do no good. I have formed my opinion. We will not open the subject. I know all; nevertheless I am Jim's mother. His good name, his wishes, are of much account in my sight. I will extend to you the protection of my roof. You are left in my charge. I am responsible for you."

"And you are my jailor," I interrupted bitterly.

"As you please. I shall certainly do all in my

power to prevent your straying from the path of virtue."

"I have never left it. You have no right to say so," I cried passionately, my face in a blaze.

"Pray, pray do not let us argue—it is bad for me, and still worse for you, I shall do my duty by you. More no one can expect. One word, Miranda does not know—only I. She is a girl of lofty character, so that I do not fear your *influence* on her, and fortunately you have no tastes or friends in common. We will never touch upon this most painful topic again, and if you are able to move, we will go up to town the day after to-morrow. The sooner we can leave the better. I do not wish to hurry you, but I am certain that you will see the propriety of quitting this place and its associations as soon as possible. The house is let; most of the servants are dismissed, and your boxes are already packed."

I made an effort—unlike poor Mrs. Dombey—and was able to leave my bed the next day, and the following one, we departed from Sandgate; I felt quite wooden and apathetic, and cared not where I went. From no point did one little ray of hope shine upon my future. I had nothing to look forward to but bad news, the probable prospect of hearing that Jim was wounded or had been killed; and if he were to die, still holding such an opinion of me, of what would my innocence avail me, what would all the clearing up and justification in the world, do for me after *that?*

We lived very quietly in Grosvenor Street, for Mrs. Karslake was in no frame of mind to receive company, with her only son on active service. Jim had volunteered, and gone with the camel corps expedition up the Nile. Miranda had been told that Jim and I had had a "difference of opinion," and she was too proud to question me, and possibly too well bred to allow her curiosity to get the better of her manners. Of course she must have felt some natural thrills of satisfaction, when her mother unfolded to her a very faint outline of the truth; a most washed out sketch it must have been, and surely Miranda must have said to herself, that if Jim had been wise, and had married *her* friend, he

would have had no domestic storms, or scandals. She was colder, more detestable, and more condescending than ever. She disliked me (and made no secret of her aversion) why, I could not discover, for I effaced myself, as much as possible, and always maintained towards her a studiously courteous manner, and she was not in Jim's secret, like his mother. I liked the old lady by far the best of the two. Now that I knew her better, I discovered that her haughty mien, and piercing eye, meant nothing! Her bark was worse than her bite, but Miranda's bite was serious, her bark inoffensive. I soon became aware that she ruled her mother despotically, and was a selfish, cold-hearted, ambitious, young woman. Mrs. Karslake admired and bowed down to Miranda, but Jim was her favourite child, and he too ruled her, and made her bend to his will—notably with regard to me. We both loved Jim better than anyone in the world, and this was a link between us, a link we never alluded to, but it was there all the same. I noted her eager scanning of the mail news, her trembling interest in the telegrams, second only to mine, and I surprised her in tears one day holding Jim's photograph in her hand. He wrote to her constantly (to me of course never) and she vouchsafed me such stray crumbs, as that "he was well and he did not feel the heat as much as other fellows. They were all full of confidence in reaching Khartoum; the camels were slow, sandstorms were pretty bad, and water was scarce," and for such scraps as these, I figuratively fawned upon her as piteously as any starving dog. Sometimes I felt inclined to tear the letter out of her hand, or to go down upon my knees and implore her to let me see it; but luckily I kept my foolish impulses well under control, and was apparently grateful for small mercies.

I did not see much of my relations-in-law, except at meal times. I had a small sitting-room to myself, where I lived aloof, with Shawn, as in a fastness; no one ever crossed my threshold. Here I sat and read and worked, and thought, and fretted away most of my good looks, and wept till my eyes became quite dim, and painful. I had no communication with the outer world, save occasional gossipy letters from ignorant and unsuspicious

Annie Evans, who had not a notion of the real state of affairs. She was now at Malta. It was a delightful place, the prospect of active service had blown over, and why did I not come out? Jim was very well, he was going in for racing and yachting, he had come across some old friends, and she did not see much of him. My correspondence with Billy Park was at a standstill, for had not Jim painted me in the blackest character to Uncle John, and he, though generally an easy going old gentleman, had very strict notions of propriety. He would not permit my cousins to have any communication with me, and one of my bitterest moments, was when I received my own letter to Mona, returned unopened, and addressed by uncle's relentless hand. I do not think my mother-in-law disliked me, as much as she felt it was her *duty* to do! I was far more manageable than she anticipated; very quiet, very silent; gave no trouble and taxed her powers of surveillance but little. I was never allowed to leave the house alone, on foot, or otherwise; on Sundays my place in church was between Mrs. Karslake and Miranda. They were a very tall, upright pair and it seemed to my indecorous mind—as if I had a policeman at each side of me. On week days Miranda had her own friends and pursuits—her pursuit I should say—a wealthy, and above all things, a titled husband. Have I ever described Miranda? She was tall, very slight, and carried herself admirably—Indeed she had the port of an Empress, and looked, that *she* should command, and all would obey, and so we did. She ruled the household from garret to wine-cellar.—Her head was shapely, and well set on her shoulders; her features aquiline; her hair was black, and her eyes a sort of steel grey, with thick black lashes. She would have been a remarkably handsome woman (somehow you could not call her a girl), but for a square and heavy jaw, and the cold and arrogant expression of her eyes—they never smiled. At times she showed the upper row of her perfect teeth, and that was her nearest approach to smiling. She looked upon all demonstration, as both foolish and vulgar! She did not sing, or paint, or dance; but she rode in a stately, processional style, played solemn

marches and minuets on the piano, spoke French like a native, and had the peerage and the sayings and doings of the upper ten, at the ends of her cool, taper fingers.

Mrs. Karslake did not care for society. She much preferred her comfortable arm-chair, her knitting, and a religious novel, and to do her balls and weddings at second hand, by means of a smart society paper. She had no heavy anxiety on her mind now, besides myself, for Jim had rejoined his regiment at Malta, with a slight wound, a medal, and a sun-tanned skin. Every afternoon we went for an airing in the brougham, and oh! how I disliked these daily drives; as she shopped, or paid visits, I was left in the carriage. I wondered if she had ever shocked the respectable coachman, or footman, by telling them to keep an eye on *me?* The more I lived aloof and apart, the more silent and stupid I became. The violent throbbings of agonised despair, had now settled down into the dulness of habitual pain. I was figuratively *dead*, and no one seemed to miss me! not Jim, not my summer Sandgate friends, not the O'Briens, not even my father. He had never sought me, or sent me a line since that disastrous night, when I had put *his* fate to the touch and lost *my* all. He had given me no thanks; no sympathy, no, not even one sign. I had fallen between two stools. I had tried to serve two masters, and my present forlorn condition was the miserable result. One gay spring morning, I felt more than usually wretched; everything and everybody seemed to have taken a new lease of happiness, after a long wet winter—every one but me. The trees, the birds, the people walking and talking on the sunny side of the street, carriages full of girls in high spirits, and fresh spring costumes, driving parkwards, whilst I sat up stairs, as much alone, as if I lived on a desert island, watching them through my tears. How long was it since *I* had laughed, or spoken to a friend!

Just then Mrs. Karslake made an unexpected ascent into my room, and found me crying. Naturally she asked the reason?

"Why should I not cry?" I demanded, brusquely.

"I see no reason, my dear," she answered softly,

"and I hope it is a sign of your penitence," she added solemnly.

"Penitence!" At that word my soul was up in arms. I rose, I dried my tears. I felt bolder than I had done for months, and I spoke out bravely.

"I declare to you Mrs. Karslake, that I am innocent of any thought or deed that does not become Jim's wife. It is *he* that will be penitent some day. What I did, I did to clear my father. I was nearly driven crazy between my duty to him and Jim. Colonel Kant is the guilty man. I know it. He even confessed as much to me, when I went to him, and denounced him. He threw the proofs of his guilt into the fire, and laughed in my face, and said he would destroy me, as he did my mother. She would not marry him—did you not know? My father's trial and all the anxiety were the cause of her death, and Colonel Kant has been the cause of worse than death to me. Do you not think it has been slow, lingering agony to me to live here, watched, despised and on sufferance, and supposed——Some day Mrs. Karslake I believe you will have to have me removed to a padded ward at Colney Hatch—if I don't *die*, but I am afraid there is no chance of *that*. I am far too young and strong—I have lost Jim. I've lost my friends, what have I to live for? *Why* should I not cry?"

Mrs. Karslake stared fixedly at me, as I poured out these sentences in an impetuous torrent. I am sure she thought that I had taken leave of my senses. Presently she got up and said:

"Ellen, I don't know what to say, or whom to believe, but Jim is never mistaken. On the other hand, I have found your conduct always most correct. You are truthful, retiring, and modest—and well, I'm much fonder of you than you might suppose, and I often wonder what Jim would say, if he knew that I made excuses for your folly. As far as you were concerned, it was nothing but folly. Colonel Kant is a worldly, unscrupulous man. You are a beautiful girl, and being young—no mother——"

"There, don't, don't Mrs. Karslake," I interrupted excitedly, "make *no* excuses for me, they are all non-

sense; youth and beauty had nothing to do with it, but death and crime. You have seen Colonel Kant. Pray do you suppose that he could rival Jim with any sane woman, much less with me, his wife?"

"Yes, true there is common sense in what you say. Jim is a very handsome fellow," with a glow of motherly pride, "and certainly he was very fond of *you*. Oh, my dear! you should *never* meddle, even with the best intentions, with these bad men, and in these police cases. See what has come of it!"

"I see, indeed," I answered with a sob. "Jim and I are separated for ever, as much as if we were dead. You cannot think what awful things he said to me. They seem to be ringing in my ears yet."

"You will make it up some day," she answered, soothingly. "Jim does not forget you—see here—" unfolding a slip of white and blue paper, "he sent you this cheque, enclosed in a letter to me to-day."

"For what?" I enquired, taking it and examining it. It was for £200.

"For your dress, and pin money, to spend as you please."

"Nothing with it—not a line, are you *sure?*"

"Oh, my dear, quite certain, but perhaps you would like to send *him* some little message through me?" she suggested, with a rather nervous smile.

"Yes," I answered, in a sudden access of passionate impatience with my fate. "Give him *this*."

And I tore the cheque furiously into four pieces, and thrust them back into her dismayed keeping.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A MEETING.

"The fit's upon me now!
Come quickly gentle lady."

ONE gay afternoon in May, there was a block in the traffic at Hyde Park Corner, and in a brougham alongside of our victoria, sat an old lady; her sole companion, a supercilious looking, pink-eyed poodle, who had the front seat all to himself. I was at her side, and the

glass of the brougham was down. Could this feeble, withered, bent, old woman, with a kind of palsy in her head be grandmamma? Our faces were quite close together. We stared hard at one another, and she recognised me. To my great surprise, she actually put out her head, and said in a weak, quavering voice, "Come and see me, Ellen, come to-morrow;" and then there was a plunge forward on the part of our horses: the critical meeting was over.

"That was Mrs. Le Marchant, was it not?" exclaimed my mother-in-law. "Did she ask you to go and see her to-morrow? for if so, you must go. She is an immensely wealthy old woman and has a great deal in her power."

"So I have heard," I muttered indifferently.

"But of late she has gone into retirement; her health is completely shattered: she has had some kind of seizure. She was a wonderfully well preserved woman for her years. She is a good deal older than I am. Although perhaps you would not think so?"

"Oh yes I would," I replied. I said no more. It was not for me to reveal the secrets of the prison house, and tell her about grandmamma's wig and false teeth!

Of course I availed myself of grandmamma's invitation, and the next afternoon I was deposited at her familiar door. Morris met me in the hall, quite like an old friend, and casting up her eyes, and hands, exclaimed:

"Laws, Miss Ellen, I hardly knew you! I am real glad to see you.—You will find the mistress greatly changed and broken down—and aye, deary, deary me, that was a terrible business about Mr. Bellamy." I could not help smiling at her tragic face; it was very seldom that I smiled now.

"And how you are changed. I remember well your standing at the glass in there," indicating our mutual den, "and saying to me, that you would be a beauty yet—and your words have come true! who would have thought it!"

"Not you at any rate, Morris! But I must be going upstairs."

"And your husband, Miss Ellen, is an officer and

away abroad, a young and handsome gentleman, very different to poor Mr. Bellamy. Laws!" as if struck by some poignant recollection, "how he did carry on to be sure. If I can get time. and leave from your grandmamma, I'll step over and see you, but I dared not otherwise. She's that suspicious. She knows *everything.*'

I wondered if she knew about Jim and Colonel Kant, and me? I said to myself, as I walked upstairs. I found my aged relation sitting in a deep chair, with her back to the light, in a dimly lit room. She evidently expected me. She did not move as I entered, but deliberately adjusted her glasses and stared hard, and I found in my inmost heart, that I was still mortally afraid of her, and was sorry I had come.

"Well, Ellen, you see a great change in *me.* I feel sure I am breaking up fast. Come over here, and sit down where I can see you. You are a handsome girl after all. I used to think, you would be hopelessly plain."

I blushed vividly, and felt quite awkward and apologetic.

"You have all your career before you, and there is no greater power than beauty. Employ it well. I, on the other hand, am at the end of my little day, and I wish that I had used it better. By this time next year, this place will know me no more. I shall be in Kensal Green—and *not* regretted. Yes, I shall have passed into the unknown country: but enough of this. I desired to see you, my only living kin, for the approach of death softens us all. I shall say nothing about the shock your running away gave me, and the *esclandre,* and its consequences, which fell on *me.* You have since married to please yourself, I hope you are *happy?*"

She gazed at me so steadfastly, that in spite of myself, I was obliged to look away—but already she had read my secret.

"So that is it!" she said slowly, "and what has caused the rift within the lute? Does he drink, or flirt, or gamble; or is it you, and has my letter been prophetic? Surely Ellen, it is not *you?*"

"It is I, grandmamma—and it was all on account of my father," speaking with an uncontrollable impulse,

and almost breathless from the palpitation of my heart. "I have always been afraid of you, but I am not so now—at least not much. You are my father's mother—I wish to speak for him. He was innocent. He *is* innocent, and, oh prepare yourself for some strange news."

"Yes, I am prepared," she answered huskily.

"He is alive; he is in England. I have seen him."

"Alive, and where," trembling violently as she spoke.

"I do not know. I have not seen him since last September at Sandgate."

"And Philip is alive! I must see him once more. My son, my only son; poor Philip—*what* a life!" and she leant back in her chair, and covered her face with her thin, wrinkled hands.

"You would say so, if you knew all, Grandmamma, he was as innocent of the crime as you were. I know all about it," bringing my chair closer and laying my hand on her arm, I said, "You will listen, I will tell you the whole story, nay, two, his story and mine."

"Yes, my dear, I'll listen," she said slowly, removing her hands and opening her eyes. "What is there for me to do now, but listen?"

Fancy grandmamma calling me "my dear;" times were changed indeed!

I began at the very beginning; gave her as clearly and fully as possible, an outline of my visit to Billy Park, to the graveyard and the bog, my acquaintance with Dominick Kelly, my marriage, and finally my awful experience at Sandgate. All the while, as I waxed more excited, more eager, and more rapid, in my flow of words, my listener never suffered even an ejaculation to escape her. She merely shook her palsied head, or raised her hands, when I told her something unusually startling; at last I ended, lamely enough, with a fervent protestation of my father's innocence, and then she raised herself erect, and looked at me steadily, and said:

"Ellen, you are a good, faithful girl! I believe every syllable of what you tell me. Your words have the ring of truth.—I go further, and believe in Philip too. Had you not been very certain of his innocence, you would never have risked as you did your *all*, and lost. I am a

changed, stricken old woman, the pomps and vanities of this world have fallen away from me, and many friends, and I now turn at last to my own flesh and blood. I often meant to write to you since my illness, but pride held back my pen, but when I saw your pretty, frightened face so close to mine yesterday, I was glad, very glad. I must see much of you; why should you not come here—I believe in you!—and live with me? I am your grandmother, who reared you—not very kindly it is true. Live with *me*, for the short remainder of my days."

I dared not, and said so; was I not bound over hand and foot, and delivered over to my mother-in-law, and if I returned to grandmamma's roof, Jim would take it as a matter of course, that I ran away *again*.

"Well, it's very hard," grumbled grandmamma. "Why should he tyrannise over you; you are independent."

But I was not, I had not one shilling in the world that I could call my own. It galled me to eat Mrs. Karslake's bread, live in her house, and drive in her carriage, but where else could I have gone?

"Oh I forgot," said grandmamma, suddenly recollecting herself, "but have you no pin-money?"

"Yes, but I never touch it," I answered shortly.

"We are proud I see. Well, you shall no longer be *poor*. I shall lodge five hundred pounds to your credit to-morrow, at Coutts' bank. A young married woman, even on the *best* of terms with her husband, feels all the pleasanter, for a little loose cash, and get yourself a new bonnet my dear, *do*," looking disapprovingly at my head-gear.

"I don't care a bit about dress now—who have I to dress for?"

"Nonsense, all will come right in good time." (Curious how sanguine these two old ladies were.)

"I used to think so, but look at my father, *he* has been waiting for his right for twenty years," I answered dismally.

"I shall put the matter in detective hands once more. Oh, why was not I referred to by you, and Philip! a couple of foolish amateurs, who walked into the lion's den. If I had had that book and placed it in the proper

quarter, all would have been well now. There is a ring! a carriage at the door; it's your mother-in-law. Of course I won't see her. I see no one.—Give her my compliments though, and say, that she must spare you to me often, *often*. Stoop down and kiss me. Dear me, what a nice, cool, fresh young face. Surely if Gervase Karslake were to see you now, he would never harbour one suspicious thought. Tell me honestly Nellie, was it an *arrière pensée* of *him*, that made you jilt Mr. Bellamy?"

"No grandmamma," I said earnestly, "no *indeed*. In those days Jim and I detested one another. He thought me an awful girl, but I would rather be thought that, than what he thinks *now*."

"There, then, run away. I won't believe it's as bad as you fancy. Don't keep Mrs. Karslake waiting Come and see me again very soon—to-morrow, if you can."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A STRAY PARAGRAPH.

I am not now in fortune's power,
He that is down can fall no lower.

—BUTLER.

WHEN the ice had thus been broken, I went over to Green Street constantly, was carefully left there by my mother-in-law, and duly sent home in state in grandmamma's brougham; the distance was trifling, and I could easily have walked, but neither of the old ladies would hear of the suggestion, Mrs. Karslake, because she was on her honour not to trust me out of her sight alone, and grandmamma because she considered me too young and pretty to walk about unattended. She seemed to think a great deal of my visits now, and I really spent as much time with her as I could possibly spare. I read to her, and told her all the little tit-bits of chit chat, that I could think of, picked up at second hand from Miranda's lips at meal times. I also picked up dropped stitches, set up her knitting, wrote her notes, did all her small commissions, brought her flowers, periodicals and new photos, and was as useful to her as I knew how to

be. One thing she could never prevail upon me to do, and that was to open the piano and sit down to it and sing.—It was actually the last week in July before we left town. Miranda wished to see the season out to the bitter end, and many and many a weary night, did she keep her unlucky old mother out of bed till it was daylight, conveying her from one entertainment to another, but in spite of her magnificent deportment, and her stately manner, Miranda's fair hand was as yet unsought. She would have made an admirable countess —for show, alone—to sit in an opera box, or a carriage, to walk into a room in the van of lesser creatures, to preside at some splendid feast. All *this* Miranda could do to perfection, but as a wife! if I were a man, I would as soon marry a fly blister! She would be a lady, within whose gates it would go hard with husband and children, and man servants, and maid servants.

I never languished for gaiety. I was now as staid and subdued as any old woman, so that being kept in the background, fell in with my own wishes, and also Miranda's She had no desire, that I should shine by her side in the social circle. I was well aware of this, and when people were expected to lunch, or dropped in to afternoon tea, I never appeared. I was extremely glad to escape from the glare of London, to the cool green country, but grandmamma was in a dreadful state of mind. She made me promise to return from time to time to visit her, and this I agreed to—if Mrs. Karslake had no objection! I had written to my father repeatedly from grandmamma's house, imploring him to come and see her, but no answer had arrived, nor had I any idea of his whereabouts. I wrote to the post master at Drumdear, and he replied, that he believed Dominick Kelly had gone to America, or England—wide margin! I wrote again, enclosing ten pounds to assist him in making further enquiries, and then I went down to Karslake. This was the name of the family place, a fine old country seat, quite buried in a park, five miles from a station, and two miles from the nearest village. It belonged to Sir Anthony, Jim's uncle, who never lived there himself, and was good enough to place the house at Mrs. Karslake's disposal. Miranda could not endure

it. It was much too rural and dull to suit her tastes, and as I had never heard much about it, I was agreeably surprised when I made its acquaintance. The house was old and rather ugly, a variety of owners had added to it and improved it (?) in accordance with their individual tastes, but it was very large and comfortable, and for such a big place, home-like.

I really began to feel something like my old self once more, as with a shady hat on my head, and Shawn for company, I roamed about the spacious park and delightful gardens, or sat under a hay-rick, with the last new novel in my lap. We had company too; carriages full of visitors came daily rolling up the long avenue, that curved through the park, like a big white serpent; but Mrs. Karslake and Miranda entertained them. I believe my existence was hardly guessed at, for I did not accompany my relations to church, or appear in that public place—the family pew. I preferred walking across the fields alone in the cool of the day, and taking an obscure position in one of the free sittings. There were various junketings in which I took no part, tennis and garden parties, and on these occasions I made it a point to keep well out of the way in the remotest corner of the grounds, or in the retirement of my own apartment. One drowsy afternoon, tired of reading, tired of walking, and having no correspondence to occupy my empty hours, I suddenly bethought myself of a small box of household treasures, that had never been opened since it was nailed up at Sandgate—nearly a year previously. With a chisel and a hammer, Moss wrenched off the lid, and then left me to sit on the floor, and unpack and renew my acquaintance with many very cherished little household gods; they were chiefly presents. For instance, there was Aunt Julia's pet water colour, a dear old friend; uncle's gift, an ancient silver bowl; Annie Evans' silver candlesticks; Mr. Jarvis' album; an embossed silver frame, containing a large photograph of Jim, in full dress uniform. I unwrapped it from its paper cover, and looked at it for a long time. Who would believe that that face could be so pitiless, and so fearfully altered and distorted by passion—no one, unless they had seen it as *I* had done? I began to

replace its covering, with a sigh, first silver paper, then newspaper. Moss was a conscientious packer. Suddenly my eye fell on a small paragraph and the words "True Blues." I glanced over it hastily, and this is what it said: "*Lunatic at large.*" "Yesterday morning at an early hour, an elderly man of respectable appearance was given into charge for making a serious disturbance in the neighbourhood of the Officers' Mess, True Blues, Shorncliffe camp. He assaulted two mess waiters, and the sentry, and was only restrained by main force from throwing himself on one of the officers. At first it was supposed that he was a dun, but on enquiry, he gave his name as Julius Cæsar, and turned out to be a dangerous lunatic. On further examination, it was discovered that he was a ticket-of-leave, and was handed over to the proper authorities." So this was the solution of the mystery, my father's long silence, and why I had never had a line from him since that disastrous night, when he had left me at Colonel Kant's door. He must have known that my expedition had been a miserable failure; must have seen my return, disgraced, and empty handed, and his sorely tried mind had given way at last; and my faint hope, that he would reappear and right me, was completely extinguished. As I read this paragraph, from the *Dover Standard*, dated the day after my miserable fiasco, I felt that a black pall of despair had now settled down permanently upon the rest of my life. For several days after this conviction had come home to me, I remained in my room, and wept and fasted, and refused to be comforted; but after a time I listened to Moss's affectionate expostulations, and to the angry clamour of my own common sense—What was the use of making myself ill? Matters were quite bad enough as it was. I must rouse myself once more, and carry the burthen of existence bravely. I thought of those lines of Longfellow's, they were constantly ringing in my head:

> "Into each life, some rain must fall,
> Some days must be dark and dreary."

But my life seemed to be one long rainy day—without a single break in the clouds.

CHAPTER XL.

MRS. FLINT IN HER TRUE COLOURS.

"A thing devised by the enemy."

ONE warm August day, about five o'clock, I was sitting on the steps of an old time ruined tea house, with my hat off, Shawn making a mat of my dress, and my whole attention absorbed in a book. All at once I heard distant sounds of high sopranos laughing and talking, and one or two muffled basses, responding thereto.

Could it be the garden party coming up to the Folly, merely because they had nothing better to do?

I started up aghast. There was no escape for me, for the only pathway leading to my hitherto sacred retreat, was already in the hands of the besiegers. I was cut off.

Sounds ascend. This Folly was on the top of a little hill, and presently voices became distinct. One familiar one (Miranda's), was leading the assaulting party. I rushed up the steps, and into the old tea house, which possessed a rustic table and half a dozen chairs, and seating myself at the further side, put on my hat, pulled it well over my face, and resting my elbows on the table, pretended to be deeply immersed in my study, and waited.

"Oh, she roams about," said Miranda.—Who was *she?*

"Quite a matter of opinion," she returned to some question, "and very eccentric—*some* people admire her."

"I should like to make her acquaintance, and see if I am to be one of the people," said a man's voice. At this instant, he reached the summit with his partner, and as he walked up the steps he said:

"By Jove, that's a pretty stiff pull!"

And then he turned and entered, and was face to face with *me*. I was not nervous now, not nearly as much put out as Miranda. She looked desperately

annoyed, and would have carried him away, but quite a crowd of men and maidens came storming up the steps after her. Perhaps they had visions of a delightful surprise in the shape of tea and ices!

"You here, Ellen," exclaimed Miranda, with a curious laugh, "How very absurd! I am afraid we have invaded your sweet solitude, but we will go," turning to the crowd, with a playful gesture of dismissal.

"Certainly not. Pray don't dream of such a thing on my account," standing up and seeing to my amazement a familiar face confronting me, Lily Flint's, Lily, now a rich and well-dowered widow—Mr. Flint had been so obliging as to give her liberty, within little more than a year of their marriage.

She hurried over, as if we had been bosom friends, and accosted me with rapture.

"So delighted to see you, dear Mrs. Karslake. How well you are looking!" kissing me, before I had time to take breath. "I hope you have good news from Jim?"

Here was effrontery.

"He is quite well, thank you," I returned evasively.

"And when did you hear from the dear Maxwells, nay, Maxwells no longer, we have *all* (with a simper) changed our names."

Her train of reminiscences was broken in upon by Miranda, who said to me brusquely, as if throwing the remark at my head:

"Ellen, Colonel Moore wishes to be introduced to you. He has just returned from Malta, and knows Jim."

Colonel Moore was the man who had entered first and had found the hill so steep, and yet he had no need, for he was thin and spare, and was surprisingly young to be a Colonel. He had very blue eyes, a big fair moustache, and a clever, good looking face. As I stood at the table, I noticed that I, in my garden hat, and rather tumbled (though clean that morning) white gown, was the cynosure of every eye; the ladies gazed at me with unaffected curiosity, the men with—shall I say, respectful admiration, tempered with surprise. I was introduced to several of both sexes, by Miranda, in a kind of angry gabble. I had come out into society, quite unintention-

ally, and with a vengeance. Half the neighbourhood had now seen Miranda's eccentric sister-in-law, and I neither wore the divided skirt, or straws in my hair. Several people made polite enquiries about my absent husband, and how I liked the country? and then there was a general move, and I was swept away with the crowd to tennis and tea. Colonel Moore and another man, had a polite struggle as to who should walk with me, and it ended in a compromise. I had the escort of both—one on either hand. We were rather a tight fit going down the narrow pathway between laurels and rhododendrons, but luckily we were all slim.

"I am delighted to have the pleasure of meeting you, Mrs. Karslake," began Colonel Moore. "Your husband is an old friend of mine. When did you hear from him last?" This was indeed a poser. I fancy I became crimson, but luckily my companions were looking straight ahead, and did not notice my confusion. Perhaps Colonel Moore thought I was deaf, for raising his voice a little, he said:

"I've just come back from Malta about three weeks ago—Karslake is very fit. Valetta suits him down to the ground—polo, boating, racing, lots of things going on. It's a great pity that you're afraid to face the climate." (*What* fable had Jim been inventing?) "You look pretty strong, and I am sure you would find a winter on the island delightful."

"I daresay I should," I faltered feebly. What else could I say? Possibly my stiff, unsympathetic bearing nettled him, and he became still more urgent:

"Go by the continent, Naples, Sicily. Avoid the long sea, arrive about November," continued this kind-hearted, unsuspicious creature. "You come in for all the balls, the fleet is bound to be in. You have the opera, capital opera, three times a week, delicious climate, oranges, quite a sight in the 'San Antonio' gardens, picnics to St. Paul's Bay, trips to Gozo, Sicily, and in fact you'll find it the best billet in the world. Are you fond of riding?"

"No."

"Ah well, you can have yachting, and tennis, and driving. I am sure, Karslake is dying for you to go

out. He has lost his spirits a good deal, rather silent, and glum. I understand it all *now*."

Poor man, poor Colonel Moore! little did he know what he was talking about.

I made no reply, silence is safe—silence is golden.

"Karslake did uncommonly well in Egypt, as you know. He has been recommended for the Order of Distinguished Service, and was mentioned in despatches. I expect he will soon get his majority, as well as a D. S. O."

"Do you think so?" I murmured faintly.

"Yes. Kant has gone, and a good riddance. There was always something I did not like about that fellow. Did *you* ever hear anything about him?" dropping his voice to a confidential key. My other escort now made a mad effort to get in a word about the weather, and tennis, and I found I could discuss these topics much more comfortably than those started by Colonel Moore. Our conversation was only terminated by our arrival at the tea tables—spread under large elms, near the tennis-ground, and covered with all manner of tempting dainties, strawberries and cream, ices, hot cakes, sweet cakes, shortbread, &c. Everyone seemed cheered by the prospect. I sat down near one of the tables, and to my surprise, Miranda suggested that I should pour out tea. I had had very grave doubts about mixing with the company at all. I ought to have strayed away down a side walk, and escaped. I was not dressed for the occasion. I glanced around at all the girls, and young married women, clad in such pretty summer costumes, and felt myself very much beneath the occasion, but I could not run away now, so I drew up a chair, and commenced my allotted task. My mother-in-law now arrived, with several old ladies in tow, and gazed at me in spell bound amazement, but eventually accepted the situation and a cup of tea.

I heard Colonel Moore accosting her, and saying, "I am so glad to meet Mrs. Gervase Karslake. I have been telling her all about him, and how well he did in Egypt, and how fit he looks: only of course he is a little down on his luck, being out there without her—I've been saying, she really *must* go out this winter."

I did not venture to look at my mother-in-law during this innocent speech. I only humbly trusted that she would be able to command her countenance. My face I was certain was, what is known as "all colors," and yet why should I blush? I asked myself angrily; what cause had I for shame? I was now aware, without actually turning round, that some one had gently subsided into a seat beside mine, Mrs. Flint of course. She addressed me in a voice of suspicious sweetness, saying:

"Dear Mrs. Karslake—I do want a nice chat with you so much. I am so fond of talking of old times! How well you are looking," she added, with a smirk, "hardly a day older, and pray," with a very complacent smile, "how do you find *me?*"

"You look remarkably well," I said, surveying her calmly. She was a very pretty woman; in a hard, fair, what I may call *tight* style. There were no flushes, or dimples, or quick changes in her face; it always wore the same expression. She was magnificently dressed, in a costume that might be taken for second mourning—or not; but after I had scrutinized her closely, I was convinced that her complexion was slightly artistic. "I never saw you looking better," I said politely.

"Oh dear, don't say that," throwing up her pale grey gloved hands. "I'm a perfect wreck! I've had great troubles as you know, dear. Darling Robert's death" (leaving her indisputable mistress of a large fortune and money, her god) "was a fearful blow. He was much older than me, not quite—to *you* I may say it—the husband for a young girl, who was all heart." (What nonsense was this?) "I made a great mistake, but we will not talk of it now, we are all," shaking her head dolefully, "liable to make mistakes, in the most important crisis of our lives, the bestowal of ourselves in marriage. Men make these blunders too," looking at me hard, "don't you think so?"

"No doubt," I answered laconically, as I filled up two cups, and wished from the bottom of my soul she would go away, and take her confidences elsewhere; but no, she bent over me and said: "Now that is the very last. Do come under these pretty trees and indulge me in a

nice *tête-à-tête*. Do you know, I have taken a little country place, not far from this. I shall expect you to visit me often. There is nothing like the friends of one's girlhood."

But this was all rubbish! our acquaintance had been of the slightest; she had no occasion to prosecute my society then; query, what did she want *now?*"

I presently found myself pacing along the grass with her alone, she, to my disgust, leaning heavily on my reluctant arm.

"Dear old Karslake," she sighed, looking over at that ugly, but imposing pile, "and I might have been its mistress!"

"*Indeed*," I returned, in a frosty voice. "At present it belongs to Sir Anthony."

"You know very well what I mean; it will be Jim's some day."

What right had she to call him Jim?

"By the way, I was *so* amused at poor blundering Colonel Moore, talking in that stupid way about you and Jim. Of course he has been abroad, and out of everything and doesn't *know*."

"Know what?" I asked, my heart beating very fast indeed, but wreathing my face in an agreeable smile.

"Why, what every one knows, my sweet child! that you and Jim do not hit it off at all," with a spiteful quiver in her voice.

"You have no reason to say so."

"Oh, yes, I have several reasons for saying so. In the first place, I heard it from Miranda. She is a great chum of mine. I met her at Cannes last spring twelvemonth. Then with you, I have the privilege of an *old* friend, and finally I take such a deep, deep interest in poor Jim. I am *so* sorry for him," she concluded with impressive gravity.

"Pray, explain yourself?" I demanded in my most chilling manner.

"I will," she rejoined, insidiously. "You know that Jim was madly in love with me once, and in a moment of girlish caprice I changed my mind, and have regretted it ever since," shaking her head up and down, "yes, *ever* since."

"But I think you might keep the expression of your regrets, from me, his wife," I said very sternly; and I now found that there was a considerable reservoir of jealousy latent in my disposition. The idea of this woman daring to tell me, to my face, that she was exceedingly sorry that she had not married Jim, made my heart burn like fire within me; I was very angry, but worse was coming.

"And that's not all," she said tearfully; "I have reason to know that he *never* got over it, and rushed into a marriage with you out of pique. You remember at Glenmore, he could not endure you! There is nothing that ever comes to man or woman, to replace their *first* love; and, as I know to my cost, a marriage without love is *misery!*" and she sighed like a furnace, and cast down her eyes affectedly. I now removed her hand quietly, but firmly, from my arm, and I surveyed her for several seconds. I endeavoured to put a constraint on myself, but when I spoke, my voice shook in an undignified manner. To be quite frank, I was in a towering passion.

"Do you wish to infer that Jim married me out of pique, and that—I wonder you have the assurance to hint it—he loves you *still?*"

She made no verbal reply, but a smile of intense self-satisfaction said "Yes" in capital letters.

"Then, pray disabuse your mind at once of such a notion. Jim married me for love and nothing else."

"And is *still* devoted to you?" she said, with malicious emphasis. "Any one can see *that*," looking me full in the face, with her hard, light eyes. "If he is so fond of you, I wonder at a good many things."

"At what, for instance?"

"That he never writes to you?"

I felt myself turning pale, Miranda was indeed a traitor.

"You cannot deny what I have said," she continued gleefully; "you do not care for him, nor he for you. It is quite *true*."

"You may think so if you please, but it is of no consequence. I am really at a loss to know what you mean by bringing me here, and pouring all this malice into my ears."

"My dear Mrs. Karslake, if you had received my confidences in the spirit in which they were intended—a truly Christian one—you would have known my reasons. After all, if *I* do not tell you, some one else *will*," unable to resist the temptation. "You ought to get your husband home. I was in Malta last winter for two months, and I saw a good deal of Captain Karslake and his friends. I do not think you would care about them; especially *Mrs. Speedy*. I see people moving, so I must hurry back. Jim is your husband, not mine. I advise you to bring him to book. These designing, good-looking married women, make nice fools of young men. I'm speaking as your true friend. Good-bye," and she sailed off.

CHAPTER XLI.

TWO QUEENS IN BRENTFORD.

MRS. FLINT walked rapidly away, as if to give me no chance of making any possible retort. She had had the last word and fired the last shot. What did she mean? What had been her object in saying all those horrible things to me? Passion, humiliation—that *she* should guess at the real state of affairs—and burning jealousy consumed me. She was a dog in the manger. She would not marry Jim herself, and was furious because he had married me. She was sorry for her mistake, and was resolved to vent her spite on some one. I was to be her scapegoat—every one's scapegoat seemingly. I had wit enough to understand her, as I walked over and sat down in a low rustic chair. She had been a sly, detestable mischief-maker, even in her teens. What a goose I had been to give way to my temper; the proper thing for me to have done would have been to have listened in polite silence, and shrugged my shoulders, and laughed in her face. This was, however, much easier in theory than in practice. Again, what about Mrs. Speedy? That must be untrue—a fiction, invented on the spur of the moment. My reverie was suddenly interrupted, by hearing my own name called rather excitedly by Miranda.

"Ellen, Ellen, where are you?" she said, hurrying over the turf, at very unusual speed. I knew that the guests had long departed; it was too early for dinner. What did she want?"

"What is it?" I asked, getting up and walking down the path to meet her.

"Mother sent me to look for you," she said, waving an orange envelope and a piece of pink paper in her hand. I thought at once of Jim, of bad news, and my heart literally stood still. I presume my ghastly face was an index to my feelings, for she said:

"Oh, it's no bad news; it's nothing about Jim, but Sir Anthony is dead."

"Is he really," I exclaimed, after I had got over the first revulsion of feeling. "Poor man, it must have been sudden; you did not even know that he was ill."

"It was apoplexy—seized yesterday—died last night. I am glad the telegram did not come before, or I would have had to put off the tennis party. Come in, mother wants to see you. She is rather cut up. Sir Anthony was very good to her. It will be an awful nuisance going into black in the month of August. *You* will have to wear mourning too," as if there was some consolation in that.

"I—why—he is no relation to me?"

"But he is to *us*, and it is the same thing," she retorted sharply.

I found my mother-in-law in a tearful state, not crying heartily or uproariously, as I did myself (but I suppose this is peculiar to young people), seated in a low chair, making little dabs at her eyes with her elegant pocket handkerchief.

"Well, my dear," she gasped, "this has been a blow, only sixty nine, and carried off in a few hours. I feel terribly upset. Miranda, ring the bell. I will take a glass of port wine. Vokes," to the butler, "you can bring me a glass of wine and a biscuit. I shall not go to dinner, but Miss Karslake and Lady Karslake will dine as usual."

I felt a kind of shock as she gave her orders. Was I then Lady Karslake? Of course I was, if Jim was the heir, and the next baronet! Perhaps once upon a time

I might have felt elated at this promotion. "Yes," said Miranda, as if swallowing some very unpleasant idea, "I had not thought of that before. Of course *you* are Lady Karslake, now Jim is Sir Gervase, but I don't suppose it will make any difference; he will never leave the army and settle down here."

"I wish he would, he ought to; it is his duty. I shall write to him on the subject at once," said his mother, with unusual energy.

"I don't think he will mind you much," returned Miranda, scornfully. "He was always fond of soldiering, and as we can all see," looking rudely at me, "is not inclined to sit closely to the domestic hearth. Indeed, for my part, I think it is folly for a man to marry before he is forty—He ought to roam about the world and enjoy himself."

"Miranda, my dear, you are talking nonsense," said her mother, severely; "and now there is the dressing bell, and you have no time to lose."

Time went on, and excepting that I was called Lady Karslake, and wore a black dress, there was no change whatever in our domestic affairs. Mrs. Karslake ostensibly managed the house, but the real ruler was Miranda. She sat at the head of the table at dinner, she poured out tea, she ordered the servants about, issued invitations, kept the key of the post-bag, took out the carriage, selected the books from Mudie's, and in short, reigned supreme. I never dreamt of interfering, I was a mere cipher, and spent my time partly in my room, partly in the library, and partly in the garden. I was very fond of gardening, and one must have some occupation beside sewing and reading. I did not merely pick flowers, and call that gardening, or poke here and there with a trowel. No, I really put on a large apron, with big pockets, and worked, as I used to do at Billy Park. A long-neglected border, a wild scene of bushes of lavender, half dead fuchsias and some hideous (in my opinion) sunflowers, had been assigned to me by Campbell, the head gardener. He highly approved of my labours, "and liked to see a lady so taken up with flowers," to quote his words, and altogether he regarded my operations with much favour, but not so Miranda.

She did not care for flowers herself, excepting as an adjunct to her dress, or in the form of a bouquet, and she did not like to see me taking liberties with the garden, for after a time I extended my border and attended to more than one plot. She came upon me suddenly one afternoon, as I was grubbing away down on my knees on the gravel, my dress pinned up round me, in the act of planting a very nice tea-rose. I had scattered some earth on the walk, and she said to me in a peevish, not to say imperative, voice, "Dear me, Ellen, what a terrible mess you are making! You really must not make the place in such a state, nor garden so near the front, get a bit lower down from Campbell, and I daresay he will allow you to do your worst there; but you know very well we cannot have these front beds untidy."

I felt exactly like a naughty child, who has been sharply scolded, the more so as Campbell was looking on and listening. I became very red and apologetic, and assured her humbly that I was really doing no harm, that I was improving the border, and that I would clear away the litter with my own hands, but even this did not appease her!

"You may go on for to-day, but after this, I do beg that you will not interfere with the gardeners. You can grub, as I have said, in a less conspicuous place, down at the lower end."

And then she walked on, precisely as if she had been speaking to a servant, and had given an order that she expected to find obeyed. I heard Campbell give a chuckle, and I looked up and saw him gazing after her, with a very funny expression on his shrewd Scotch face.

"Save us a'. One would think, to hear Miss Karslake——" and here he stopped, as if his usual caution had come to his rescue.

"Think what, Campbell?" I asked, rising and shaking the earth out of my apron.

"Well, just that the garden was her own, not yours. The place is all Sir Gervase's, every stick and stone; but Miss Miranda was always master and mistress here. Sir Anthony never came near it, and Mrs. Karslake never fashes hersel'."

Which meant, as I well knew, that Mrs. Karslake was entirely under the thumb of her handsome and imperious daughter—and, for that matter, so was I.

The notion that the place being Jim's, was also mine, had never struck me before. I had been so very much in the background for the last year, that it had never dawned upon me that I had any claim to a more prominent position. "Yes, my own house," I said to myself, glancing at the irregular roof and chimneys. I saw quite clearly how stupid I had been, and how stupid Miranda must think me. She invited guests without consulting me; she constantly entertained Mrs. Flint—despite my feeble protests—she banished my dog from the house, and compelled him to live in the stables. She drove in my carriage, whilst I trudged in the sun and dust. I had borne all this with languid submission, not feeling enough interest to be roused into action. I walked up and down the gravel path, turning over various new ideas in my mind, and trying to look at myself from a new point of view. I was Lady Karslake, of Karslake, and a pretty figure I must present, pacing to and fro in a soiled garden apron, and a Zulu hat. Jim had left me in deep disgrace, in a kind of comfortable captivity, and I had accepted everything as if it were my rightful, well-deserved, due. I had been quiet and humble, and had effaced myself from society and let myself be forgotten by my friends, and for what? For what, was I being punished? For endeavouring to do my duty. There must be an end to this, I said aloud, as I came to a turn in the path, and stood facing the setting sun. I had been doing myself a great wrong, in thus tamely accepting the situation. I should have gone to Uncle, and made him hear me, since he would not read my letters. I saw that my folly had been seized upon by Miranda. Finding me so weak and unassuming, she had placed me even further back than Jim had left me. I was half a domestic cipher, and half a poor relation. "I am Jim's wife. This is his house and mine," I said to myself. "Miranda is but my guest. She has ruled so long that she cannot realise the fact. I shall give her a little more tether, and then I shall speak."

Campbell, the gardener, had unwittingly fired a mine.

* * * * *

The same evening at dinner, the mail from Malta came in. There were two letters, one for Mrs. Karslake, and one for me, from Annie Evans. I had written to her immediately after my interview with Mrs. Flint, and filled two sheets with disquisitions on the weather, needlework, and books, and had put in, as I thought, an off-hand, careless postscript.

"By the way, do you know a Mrs. Speedy and her husband? I am told they are great friends of Jim's."

I cast my eyes rapidly, feverishly, over the letter in my hand, till I came to the name of *Speedy*.

"I know the Speedys pretty well; *he* is a great chum of Jim's; they were at Rugby together, and Sandhurst. He is a pleasant, selfish, reckless man, has run through most of his money; she, poor thing, has to bear all the pinching and screwing. I am very sorry for her, and so is Jim. He tries to put a drag on Captain Speedy, and I know he has helped him, as much for her sake as his. You need not be the least jealous, my dear! She is a shabby, faded, little creature, with six children."

"A shabby, faded, little creature with six children! How truly delighted I was to hear it—not for her sake, poor thing, but my own. How many hours of weary, gnawing jealousy, had her fancy portrait — lightly sketched, by Mrs. Flint, and filled in by myself—not cost me? Evidently I *could* be jealous. I was also "born so," like Jim. Mrs. Karslake had received her letter also, torn it open, and devoured it, as she drank her coffee. Of course there was no message for me. It made me feel myself more of a cipher than ever, to see one of my companions gloating over my husband's letter, whilst I was left outside the pale of his correspondents, and to hear the other talking over the dinner party she intended to give in ten days' time, in *my* house. I felt rebellious as I listened.

"Mother," said Miranda, "it's quite time we did something. Sir Anthony will be six weeks dead by the twenty-fourth; we really ought to have a small dinner, of say, sixteen."

"Very well, my dear, as you please," assented her obedient parent.

"There are the Thorntons, and Colonel Moore, that will be three, Lady Darnford and Miss Darnford, the Dean of Talford, and his sister, Captain and Mrs. Tollemache, and her brother. The Chesters for music, Lilly Flint, and whoever is staying with her, that with our two selves, will make sixteen."

"I think you have made a very good selection," said the old lady abstractedly, "very nice indeed."

"All but Mrs. Flint," I put in bravely. "Do not ask her, Miranda, I do not like her."

"Certainly, I shall ask Mrs. Flint, Ellen," she returned in a pointedly rude manner; "she is my particular friend; the dinner is chiefly given for *her*."

"I—I," began Mrs. Karslake," rather side with Ellen. She is quite a recent friend, Miranda, and you must not forget, how she treated Jim."

"Dear mother, don't be silly! Jim has got over that, and there is no reason that she should not be my friend, or yours either. Of course we can scarcely expect Ellen to like any girl who had had the first refusal of her husband; it's not in human nature; every one likes to be *first;* no one likes to be second."

"And sometimes second thoughts are best," I returned, with a woeful effort at sprightliness.

"*Sometimes*," echoed Miranda, with a significance that made my cheeks burn. I would have given a great deal to have been ready with a nice, smart, spiteful answer, but alas! I never was prepared with an appropriate retort, till about the middle of the following day!

My silence was interpreted as giving consent to Miranda's suggestion, and soon she and her mother were deep in the arrangements for Tuesday week, and had apparently forgotten my existence, and I left them, and stole up to my own room. I pulled back the blind, and threw up the window, and looked out on the still September night. It was full moon, almost as light as day, and I noticed the figure of a man standing on the gravel, and looking up steadily at the window. He removed his hat altogether, not as a mere salutation, but

to discover his identity. My heart gave a bound of joy, as the moon showed me the face of my father. He beckoned to me imperiously to come down, and in less than two minutes, I was standing beside him.

"Well, here I am at last," he said, taking my hand in a limp clasp. "I have not seen you for a long year—not since *that* night."

As he looked into my face, his eyes shone with a deep-seated fire, and the lines about his mouth were drawn and tremulous. He was greatly aged, haggard and worn, and what is called "broken." "I am sorry it turned out so badly for you, my poor child."

"You may well say that," I assented; "going to Colonel Kant's house was a false move, and Jim! Oh, *nothing* can wash me white in his eyes; your name is now scarcely worse than mine, and we are equally innocent."

"Your name will be cleared," he returned, "mine never will. There is no chance for me in England—a ticket-of-leave, is not a man; he is a number; he has no privileges. After twenty-one years all my friends have totally forgotten me, or are dead—have died in the belief that Philip Deane got off very cheaply, and without a doubt of his guilt upon their minds. Nellie, you knew how all my plans were upset, by seeing two officers enter Kant's quarters that night. I hung about and saw you leave. I guessed how it was from your gait. I followed you. I stood below your open windows, and in that still night I heard almost every word; heard that the proofs were lost; that *you* were lost; that *I* was lost, and then my mind gave way. I have been for the last year in a place where you could do me no good—and where I could do you no good: we will not speak of it. I came out ten days ago. I have been to Billy Park. I have shown myself for your sake.—John believes me now.—He would have kept me with him, but some how I cannot rest. They are breaking their hearts about you, every one of them. I have a pocket full of letters for you here," producing several, as he spoke.

"Thank you, father," seizing them. "This is the best piece of news I have heard for a whole year, and I have something to tell *you*," and I hastily related all

about my reconciliation with grandmamma, her illness, and her great anxiety to see him, before she died.

"I will go to-morrow," he said; "I know the house well. She will never recognise me again; it's twenty-two years since we met, and I am an old man now—a changed man."

Yes, he was greatly changed since I had first seen him. As I looked at him, I could scarcely keep back my tears. If ever a countenance bore the stamp of "hope deferred," it was written on his worn, melancholy face. We talked for a long time of grandmamma, of Jim, of our relations at Billy Park, and then he said suddenly, pointing to the house:

"How do you get on here?"

"Pretty well," I answered, with a shrug.

"You never go anywhere, your very name is unknown; Miss Karslake is everything, by all accounts."

"She is—she is mistress, and rules us all."

"But that is absurd! You are no child; you are placing yourself in a false position; you submitted to your husband; but you need not give in to his sister. She is but your guest now. People are saying that Lady Karslake is not very *bright*, and by George, Nellie, they are right. When you make it up with Karslake, you may give me a hand yet. I have a presentiment, that I shall not die till my name is cleared—but after all what is a presentiment?"

At this moment, the gong sounded for prayers, and with a solemn promise of seeing me soon again, and of "making it all right for me," he gave me a hurried kiss, and I fled into the house, in time to take my usual place with as much composure, and nonchalance, as if I had been merely sitting in my own room; but my thoughts were inattentive. How they dwelt on my father's welcome re-appearance, on my chance of re-habilitation with Jim, on the three thick letters in my pocket, may be imagined, but cannot be described.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE WORM TURNS.

"The smallest worm will turn, being trodden on."
—*Henry VI.*

AFTER this evening affairs began to be (in political language) "a little strained" between Miranda and me. When it was only my own comfort that was concerned, I did not like to do battle, for Mrs. Karslake's sake; according to her lights she had been wonderfully kind to me, so I held my hand—and, a far more difficult feat, my tongue! though sometimes the task was a severe trial to both. At last Miranda placed the last straw on my load. I wanted to do some shopping in the village two miles off, and as the day was hot and dusty, hinted mildly at the pony carriage, but my hints were thrown away. Miranda wanted it herself, and closed my mouth by saying that as I was so *fond* of walking, I might just as well walk into Allbridge as about the Park, so I walked; and when I returned home, very hot and tired, and went as usual straight up to my own little sitting room, I discovered, to my surprise, Mrs. Karslake ensconced in the window seat, and looking unusually solemn. I saw she had something on her mind, but she did not burst out with it at once—as I would have done, in similar circumstances.

"I am afraid you are hot and tired, dear," she said, as I took off my hat and gloves.

"I am very hot and thirsty, that is all. I had a good many little odds and ends to get: it's only four o'clock."

"Too early for tea," remarked Mrs. Karslake, who was very rigid about the hours at which we took our meals. There was never any margin, one way or the other.

But I had my own little teapot and private store of tea, and cared for none of these things! A cup of tea, I was resolved to have—and at once. I went over to a

press and opened it, and promptly produced my own particular equipage, cup and saucer, milk jug, teapot, tea-caddy, whilst Mrs. Karslake superintended my movements in stony silence.

This surreptitious tea drinking at unlawful hours, was, she presently notified, "contrary to the rules of the house."

"I often have a cup," I said boldly. "I am so fond of tea; there is nothing so refreshing. You know I never go into the drawing-room when you have people there, and I take it here alone. I would far rather miss my dinner." At this moment a housemaid came to the door and said:

"Did you please to ring?"

"Yes," I rejoined. "Please send up Moss, and tell her to bring a kettle of hot water, and a little cream."

The girl gave a kind of grin, and said:

"Beg pardon, my lady, but Moss is gone."

"Gone! gone where?" I asked, pausing in the act of ladling out tea in a shell.

"Please ma'am, she is gone away."

I stood staring at her blankly, unable to take this in. Moss was a treasure—although she was not in my confidence; she guessed a good deal. She had known me as her mistress in my own happy little home, and this was a strong bond between us.

I was so amazed, that I was positively deprived of the power of articulation for several seconds.

"Go away, Bruce," said my mother-in-law, "I will explain to Lady Karslake. In short, Ellen, I had intended telling you at once. Only you ran on with all that nonsense and chatter about tea. Moss was most insolent to Miranda, so she just sent her off at a moment's notice. She has been gone an hour. She got her full wages, and board wages, so you will have no complaints or trouble."

"Please explain all this more clearly," I said, in a tone so different to my meek every-day voice, that Mrs. Karslake gave a little jump in her chair, but she said rather irritably:

"Oh, no one could put up with the insolence of a strange servant. You could not expect Miranda to

stand it, and although Moss knew her duties, you will easily replace her. There are as good fish in the sea as ever were caught."

"But I have not heard what she said, or did, yet."

"It was all about your dog. You know how Miranda hates him, and has given orders that he is *never* to be allowed into the house. Well, she actually found him rolled up in one of the best arm-chairs in the drawing-room!" speaking as tragically as if he had bitten half the household. (Poor Shawn! in his palmy days at Sandgate he had been allowed to lie where he pleased, and had had rather a nice taste in cushions.) "Miranda was naturally greatly incensed. She got her walking stick, and beat him soundly, and in the end he snarled —and actually attempted to bite her!"

"And why not?" I mentally exclaimed. Besides, Shawn, like most red-haired people, had a hot temper.

"Moss came down when she heard the hubbub and howling, and saw Miranda chastising the dog, and was quite insolent, especially when she heard that the dog was to be sent away at once. Miranda, you know, my dear, never brooks a *word*, so she just turned her out of the house, then and there, gave her half an hour, and she packed up her things and went. The dog has been sent to the keeper's. At first Miranda was for having him *shot*, but *I* said, that he had never bitten any one before. Her skin is scarcely grazed, and it would be quite sufficient to give him away to one of the people in the village—to the butcher—what do you say?"

"I never heard of such impertinence," I exclaimed at last.

"Oh," triumphantly, "I knew you would take *our* view, though Moss stormed, and said the contrary."

"Such impertinence as Miranda's, I mean, Mrs. Karslake." Mrs. Karslake gave me a fixed look, and her jaw dropped.

"It is simply intolerable. I wonder you permitted her in my absence, to beat my dog most cruelly, and to dismiss my servant. If Moss was insolent, I would have insisted on her making Miranda an ample apology, but such a high-handed proceeding as dismissing her, is really beyond bearing."

"Ellen, Ellen, my dear, *think* of what you are saying, think of your position. Do keep your temper."

But this warning voice had no horrors for me. I was resolved to emancipate myself then and there from Mrs. Karslake—nay, from all the Karslakes!

"I am quite decided in what I am saying. My temper is beside the question, and as to my position here, it will be a very different one from this hour. Nay, hear me please, without interruption, I put myself (being weak, and prostrate) in a very false position. I leave that false attitude *now*. I gave in for the sake of peace and quiet, and because I did not care what became of me; but I am alive to my own folly. Your charge of me, has been kind, and I hope not too onerous—but after to-day it will cease. I need no longer trespass on your other claims and occupations. I am of age. I am Jim's wife. For your sake I have submitted to Miranda, and held myself in subjection in my own house, but she has passed the bounds of my forbearance to-day. I shall recall Moss at once."

As I spoke, my words seemed to leap out of my mouth, and I felt somehow as if I towered over Mrs. Karslake. She tried to answer me, but failed. The extraordinary spectacle of a daughter-in-law broken loose, had deprived her of the power of speech, but I saw fear in her eye—fear of some frightful scene between Miranda and me, where we would fly at one another, and scratch and tear one another's eyes and hair.

"You need not be afraid, I shall manage it all quietly," I said. "Surely you must see, that it is not fitting that the wife of your son, the head of your house, should be a Cinderella to his sister," so saying, I opened the door, and ran quickly downstairs. Then I went out into the yard, and called a groom. "Carson," I said, "get a horse at once, and I will give you a telegram to send from Allbridge."

It was a novelty to see *me* giving orders. I knew Moss's address, and the telegram would arrive before she reached home, begging her to return at once. I took it out and gave it to the groom, with my own hands, and as I gave it to the groom, I said "On your

way please call at the keeper's, and tell him to send up my dog."

"He is here, ma'am," pointing to the stable. "He has had a good bit of a beating, and he is rather sore."

"A bit of a beating!" Shawn lay panting in a stall, with wild eyes and lolling out tongue, chained to a staple, like a small wild beast; his delight at seeing me was unbounded, but when I touched him, he yelled with agony. I called in the coachman—a knowledgeable man—and he and I, made an examination, and discovered that, beside many sore stripes, Miranda, in her angry zeal, had broken one of the dog's ribs—no wonder he had snapped at her.

I sent for a Vet., and returned indoors with a swelling heart, and as I crossed the hall, I came face to face with Miranda, and whilst my anger was still at white heat.

"I was obliged to send away your maid, Ellen. Insolent, detestable, creature. A woman from the lodge, will come up till you get another, though indeed I don't see why you require a maid, and that odious dog of yours, look where he bit me," holding up her wrist, on which was a faint pink mark, like a pinch, "I have ordered Thompson, the keeper, to get rid of him."

She was about to walk on, with her usual style of folding me up, and putting me by, when I detained her by a gesture, and said:

"Just come into the library for a moment, Miranda. I have something to say to you."

"Dear me!" with an affected laugh. "How tragic we are," slowly following me into the room.

I closed the door after us, and said, with the glow of my newly-found courage still possessing me:

"Miranda, you have occupied my place for a sufficiently long time. I would have borne with you longer, but things have reached a climax. I may not garden in my own garden, select my own guests, or use my own carriages. So far, all this only affected myself, and I said nothing; but when you nearly beat my dog to death, and dismiss my personal attendant, you cross the Rubicon. I am all for peace. Feuds in families are not pleasant. One word is as good as ten. For the future will you kindly bear in mind, that you are my *guest*."

"I never heard of such nonsense, you little fury, just because I chastise your cur, and dismiss your trumpery maid. This is my *brother's house*, and I shall do what I please in it, and not ask your opinion." Her voice shook with passion as she spoke. "You know that he has long repented his folly in marrying you, in sackcloth and ashes, and I believe he would not allow you under this roof, if he could help it."

"Never mind, my amiable Miranda," I said in a tone of such studious civility, that she looked as if she could not believe her ears. "It is no affair of yours, what Jim thinks of me. It is a question of what *I* think of you; and if you make yourself prominent in my house, I shall be obliged to treat you, as you have treated Moss, you will have to leave at once. The servants have sense enough to know who is their legal mistress, and they will not venture to obey you, against my orders, or they will be dismissed. Spare me the pain, and yourself the humiliation, of these orders being sent down to the house-keeper, and be so good as to hand me over the keys."

The keys were in a little red basket on the writing table, and Miranda, in a furious impulse of baffled rage, snatched them up and dashed them at me, saying, "Detestable woman, you will be sorry for this," and then fled out of the room, leaving me to pick up her missiles, and to thank my stars very warmly, that the dreaded interview was over, and that Miranda had not brained me, put out one of my eyes, or marked me for life. At dinner time she came down, looking pale and sullen, and a little nervous. I was quite calm, and affected to ignore her display of temper in the library. I went quite coolly and took my place at the head of the table, and motioned her to the side. There was a gleam in her eye, and probably she would have liked to have stabbed me with her fish-knife, but there were three men waiting, and she dissembled, so did I, for I said with a matter of course air, for their benefit:

"It is time I began my new duties, Mrs. Karslake, is it not? I have been very lazy, and had a *long* holiday, but I must put my shoulder to the wheel again—this weary house-keeping, or I shall be getting out of practice,

and what would Jim say?" This was for the benefit of the servants' hall, and Mrs. Karslake smiled nervously and muttered assent, but it is not so easy to throw dust in the eyes of one's domestics, and I think they were all aware that a new reign had begun, and were inclined to shout "La Reine est morte, vive la Reine." After this domestic cyclone, there was a great calm. My mother-in-law, finding that I vanquished Miranda in single combat, took part (like human nature) with the strongest side—and that was with me. I think in her heart she too was glad to throw off Miranda's yoke. I was an easier mistress. I invited her special old cronies to lunch and dinner, I drove her about in the pony-carriage, I studied her wishes as much as possible, without absolutely giving up the reins of government. Moss had returned. She at first refused to make any apology to Miranda, who, to quote her description, "had tied up the dog first, and then beaten him cruel," but as she owned to me, that she had given her "a good piece of her mind," I prevailed upon her, for the sake of the immediate comfort of all parties, to speak a few words of regret.

"'Tis only for your sake, Miss," she called me Miss occasionally, for she had been a friend of Morris's and had known me in those days of hollow splendour in Green Street. I sent her up to grandmamma's, with Shawn. He was to remain there for the present, and take the place of the defunct and ever-to-be-lamented French poodle. So all was peace. I did not too abruptly dethrone Miranda—as she, I am certain, would have ousted me.—I came to my sovereignty by slow and easy stages; by the twenty-fourth, the day of the dinner-party, I had the reins quite gathered up, and felt the ground secure under my feet. All the guests had accepted, and I took great pains with the *menu*, and personally superintended the floral arrangements. I had a taste for flowers, and the table did me credit. The guests were all of Miranda's choosing, and oh! that Colonel Moore, or the Dean, would marry her. They would have my warmest consent, and I would be their sympathetic friend for life! It was my first entertainment, and I strained every nerve to make its success

assured. I wore black velvet and diamonds—black velvet was not strict mourning, but then I was only Sir Anthony's niece-in-law, and it is *so* becoming. Mrs. Flint had been prepared for the new dynasty, and accepted it with cool nonchalance, and I left her entertainment to her friend. I myself was in unusually good spirits, and I am sure unexpectedly hilarious and agreeable. Letters, many and long, from Billy Park, had brightened up my lonely heart. Scratchy scrawls from grandmamma, told me of her re-union with her unhappy son. All was clear between *them*. All was love and peace. (The only people left out in the cold amidst general reconciliation, appeared to be Jim and me.) Dinner was excellent, no burnt soup, watery sauce, or mysterious entrées; no awful pauses between the courses, consequently, after dinner, everyone was in high good humour! I set the elders to play at whist, the musical people to the piano, and the bores to talk to one another. The entertainment was a conspicuous success. When the last carriage had rolled away, Mrs. Karslake called me to her, and kissed me. She was in excellent spirits; she had won seven-and-sixpence from an ancient rival at cards, and had been warmly complimented on the cook.

"You managed it all capitally. I really feel quite proud of you, my dear daughter," she had never called me her daughter before; but of what did all this avail me, when Jim was not proud of me?

The morning after the dinner-party, I heard that grandmamma was very ill; according to Morris, her hours were numbered. I hurried off at once, and arrived in time to see her alive. My father was not with her, he had left London on important business (he said) the day before. His visit had probably agitated her too much, and brought on another stroke of paralysis. She was conscious, but speechless, and it seemed to afford her great pleasure to look at me, with her dim eyes fixed on my face, her wrinkled hand in mine. I read to her, I talked to her of myself, of my father, and of Jim. She heard and understood all, and closed her eyes in assent. In a few days they were closed in death—death that was a happy release, but I was sorry she had not lived to see our name cleared (if it ever was to

be cleared). Grandmamma had a splendid funeral. All that the most magnificent of undertakers could devise, was done, a few friends followed the cortége, and quite a procession of empty carriages. What hollow mockery is that form of civility, that sends one's empty carriage to swell the train of a dead friend! A few real tears, are worth leagues of the contents of a livery stable!

After the funeral, the will was read. It was short and to the point. Every penny of my grandmother's large property—money in the funds, her house in Green Street, her jewellery, laces, horses, plate, and equipages, were bequeathed to me—Ellen, Lady Karslake.

I gasped, I involuntarily drew in my breath, as I listened to the family lawyer, rolling large sums off his tongue, with deliberate unction. I had had no idea of grandmamma's wealth. She had trebled a large fortune in lucky speculations (notably by the purchase of land in the metropolis), and I was now a very, very rich young woman. There was a sealed letter for me, which I opened when alone. No money was to be spared in hunting down the real murderer of Mr. Sim, and I was to pay my father a large annuity, the letter was long, but this was its gist. My mother-in-law came to London—for Miranda had joined a gay party to Cairo—and was charmed with my sudden accession to wealth, and harangued me over and over again, on the subject of my good luck, till at last I was out of patience.

"It is very fine, of course, and very acceptable, for it makes me able to help others; but it is not everything. Money cannot purchase health or happiness, or a fair name, or justice, or love. Money is not such a wonderful magician after all."

I said this bitterly enough, as I stood looking round my own drawing-room, and my mother-in-law sat near the fire, with her bonnet untied, and a cup of tea beside her, and a bit of buttered tea-cake between her fingers.

I was thinking that I would not mind changing places with some happy mechanic's wife, who possessed her husband's love and confidence, and had no Colonel Kant to fear, and no ugly secrets in the past history of her relations.

"I have written to Jim to-day and told him that he

must come home," continued his mother. "He has a great deal of business of his own to look after, and now there is this money of yours?"

"You believe that *money* will bring him home?" I asked sharply.

"Yes, my dear, I have no doubt whatever on the subject, I am sure of it. He has to go into all kinds of affairs with his agent, about repairs and leases, he has to see his stock-broker and his lawyer, and he has to make his *will*, and that reminds me that you must do the same, Ellen. Fancy if you died intestate! Now promise me you will see to this, my dear."

"I promise you one thing," I returned, impressively. "If Jim and I make our wills, as I suppose we must, we will not leave each other, *one* penny."

My mother-in-law merely chuckled, and stirred her tea, She did not believe me!

CHAPTER XLIII.

ON URGENT PRIVATE AFFAIRS.

"Thus the whirligig of Time brings in his revenges."

In less than a month after grandmamma's death, Moss and Shawn and I, were installed in Green Street, with Morris, as housekeeper, and went in and out, and were as much at home as if we had been born there! I saw my mother-in-law daily. She could barely endure me out of her sight—not from a strict sense of the duty of "keeping her eye upon me," but actually from the promptings of affection. She usually dined with me, and I lunched with her or *vice versa*. One cold November day, she had given Shawn and me a lift as far as Hyde Park Corner, and had set us down there most reluctantly; but I insisted on getting out, to give my companion a run home: it was not more than four o'clock, but already the park was almost deserted; it was a raw, grey afternoon, and I hurried along, past where fragrant beds of hyacinths once had bloomed, with my boa drawn tightly round my throat, and Shawn cantering exuberantly before me.

Already lighted broughams, flashed up and down Park Lane, and the roar of traffic formed a sharp contrast to the damp and all but empty park. There were but few carriages, half-a-dozen conscientious riders, exercising their horses and themselves, and not many people on foot. I cannot tell why it was, that as I hastened along I was thinking of Jim (perhaps because he was generally uppermost in my mind), and was it fancy, or a lively imagination, that caused my eyes to be suddenly rivetted on a figure coming rapidly towards me, a tall slight man in a light overcoat. Surely his walk was familiar! At any rate he was familiar to Shawn! He came nearer. He came quite close to me, and—it *was* Jim—Jim, looking brown and thin, and intensely preoccupied. He did not recognise me till we were face to face, and then he started violently and said, "*Nellie.*" After a second's pause, he took off his hat, and added in quite a different voice:

"I have just been to your house——" and any bystander would suppose that he was a mere acquaintance, who had been making an afternoon call.

I was so startled by this unexpected *rencontre*, that I could only stand still and tremble.

"I have come home at last you see," he continued, "did you expect me?"

"No," I returned, feeling as if my breath had been taken away by some strong wind, "but your mother did."

"Why?"

"She thought the money would bring you."

"Yours or mine?"

"Both," was my laconic answer.

"My mother was wrong. May I walk back beside you?" looking at me with a pained, questioning glance. I bowed my head. Anything was easier than speech.

"I only arrived at Charing Cross this afternoon, and I have not seen my mother yet. I came to you first," he added in a low voice, as if there was some deep meaning in the fact.

"I am surprised at that," I answered coldly. "At any rate *she* will be glad to see you."

I flatter myself, that I had never surpassed this

speech, even in former days at Glenmore, and Jim made no reply. We walked along in dead silence, until I came to my own door, and rang the bell, with an unsteady hand—that evoked a clang from kitchen to garret.

"I am coming in," he said, "I have something to say to you."

"Certainly," I replied, preceding him up to the drawing-room—a drawing-room lit by red-shaded lamps and warmed by a bright fire; a room in which I had held several critical interviews; with grandmamma, and with Mr. Bellamy, but none as critical, as *this* was likely to prove.

I walked over and sat down in an arm-chair, and Jim laid aside his hat, and stood on the rug, and fixed a pair of very grave eyes on mine. This was not like our last awful interview, and I now returned his glance with comparative composure.

"Nellie," he said, "I have seen your father. Will not that explain all, and why I came to *you* first?"

I sat looking at him, clasping my hands together tightly in my lap. I could not have spoken if I would, and I knew that he had something else to tell me.

"I believe every word now—that you told me a year ago—does my belief come too late, Nellie? and will you ever forgive me?"

I stood up as he concluded, and laid hold of the chimney piece with one hand, and for a moment, we gazed at one another in supreme silence.

It had all come so suddenly, that I had great difficulty in finding my wits, my self-possession, and my voice.

"Yes," I said at last, in a sort of gasping whisper, "I do forgive you—I always meant to forgive you, but——"

"But what?" he asked, rather tremulously.

"But there is a condition."

"Name it."

"You know that, long ago, Knights had to prove their faith by some deed of prowess; generally they were set three tasks—I only give you *one*. You must do your utmost to clear my father's name, and bring" —my breath came quick and short, for I was desperately

agitated, "and bring the other to justice. My wrongs are but nothing, when I think of his long years of suffering."

"I will do my very best—not merely for you, Nellie—and that is enough to spur me to every exertion—but for the sake of that poor, blighted, crazy man whom I left behind at Malta."

"Crazy! Oh no, he is quite sane now. His mind was only warped with trouble, Jim. At one time I think mine was going that way too," and my eyes filled with unbidden tears.

"Nellie," he replied, "his mind may recover, but it is certainly off its balance *now*. You must see yourself, that it was the plan of a lunatic to send you alone, and carrying the very proofs of his guilt, into that scoundrel's power and presence. It was simply courting defeat to trust such a mission to a girl like you, instead of to a couple of men from Scotland Yard."

"Then you don't think it was *my* fault that it failed?"

"No, how could it be otherwise? Another mad act was leaving *me* in the dark; that was all loss to him instead of gain. It was utterly foolish and unmeaning. There is no other alternative; but one, and that neither you, or I, would accept—namely, that your father's scheme from first to last, his taking you into his confidence, and swearing you to secrecy even from *me*, making you keep stolen and uncalled for interviews, when he could have come to my house in open day, and finally using you as the catspaw to explode the mine on Kant, were all acts of most unscrupulous, and abominable selfishness."

"No, no, no, not that, Jim," I protested earnestly.

"Either that, or the other, Nellie; and I am certain it was the other; and look how our lives have been ruined and dragged down in the wreck of his; but that is over now, and I am going to devote all my time to the one burning question, 'Who murdered Sim?' If I had been in the secret eighteen months ago, I think I might have done great things, but now to hunt up more proofs and witnesses, after a lapse of twenty years, is like one of the labours of Hercules. However, I will do my very best."

"Yes," I exclaimed, "and spare no money, grandmamma made that request in a private letter to me. As for witnesses, there is old Mrs. Duffy and her son Jim. They can tell a good deal. I will be another. Yes, you may reckon on *me*. I have gone through so much, that I shall not shrink from the witness-box! I can swear to finding the proofs, and to Colonel Kant's frightened face, to his having burnt the book; *that* alone is a proof of his guilt; and indeed he almost admitted it to me. Where is my father now?"

"In Valetta, in my quarters. Poor man, I cannot tell you how I pity him, Nellie. Eighteen years of convict life have affected his mind, and made him suspicious even of *me*. It was his desperate anxiety for you that drove him out to Malta, to see me face to face. He also brought me a letter from your Uncle, I have it with me, saying 'the bearer is the father of my dear, much misjudged niece, Ellen Karslake.' He came after his usual fashion, secretly; rapped at my quarters late at night, and after a long parley, was at last admitted by Johnson. He looked terribly exhausted by a cold, rough passage, and very wild and strange, but after he had had something to eat, he told me his errand—everything. It was a heart-breaking story, and he sobbed as he related it, and indeed I felt very choky myself. I made him up a bed, and went off, and told Jarvis all about him and left him in his care, in my quarters, for he is too weak and unhinged to be moved yet, and then I packed up a few shirts, got leave on urgent private affairs, and within six hours, was steering out of the grand harbour *en route* for England. Your father will be well looked after by Jarvis, who is coming home on leave, and will bring him and also Johnson—I daresay they will be here in about ten days."

"And you believe every word of his story, Jim?"

"Certainly I do," he replied with brief decision.

"And yet you would not believe *me*. Oh, Jim!"

"That was another thing altogether. I was beside myself with jealousy. You were my wife; hearing the same facts from the old man's lips, they sounded utterly different. I thought you were merely inventing the story, to shield yourself from my not unnatural fury.

Nellie, take off your hat, and let me look at you, once more. Oh, you are a good deal changed!" as I complied with his request. "You look older, and have quite a serious, dignified air. You are a great heiress now. Is that it?" smiling a little.

"Yes; and you forget that you have not met me since I have been Lady Karslake. You would not like to see that Tomboy, Nellie Le Marchant, in her place—would you?"

"I am very sure I would, if I was certain that she was my own Nellie! How did you pass all this long year?"

"I lived through it. I just managed to kill time. I often wished time would kill *me*. But you enjoyed yourself, of course: men always do."

"Do they? much you know about it! I have lost a stone weight."

"Ah, but that was in Egypt, when you were starving up the Nile, and had nothing to drink but muddy water, that has no connection with——"

"Never mind, what it had connection with!" he interrupted hastily. "I have done with the past, I am all for the present. Nellie, the present seems too good to be true. I can scarcely realise that I am here in London, talking to you. However, I shall not be here long. I must start for Ireland immediately, with a couple of first class detectives. Have you any commands for Billy Park?"

"Yes, send Mona over here to keep me company. Take *no* excuse," was my prompt reply.

"No, certainly I shall not. It is an arrangement that will suit Jarvis down to the ground; you can pay them off in kind; remember they were sympathetic to *us*, and now I must go and see the Mater. You will write to me every day, Nellie?"

"Yes."

"And won't you say one word to me, before I go, and wish me success," taking my hand in his as he spoke.

"You know you need not ask it."

"And is that *all?*" in a tone of agitation, not unmixed with anger.

"No, Jim, it is not all," I exclaimed, unable to maintain my newly-assumed rôle of a Spartan matron. I dropped my hat and boa on the floor, and threw my

arms round his neck, and hugged him and kissed him, and had a good long comfortable cry on the breast of his light top coat.

I imagine that our respectable John Thomas was somewhat staggered, when, in bringing up the tea tray, he came upon his hitherto decorous mistress in the arms of a strange gentleman, but he had the presence of mind common to his class, and bustled about, and arranged the table and lamps, and pretended not to have noticed us. John was almost immediately succeeded by visitors —neighbours, Mrs. and the Misses Frost-Whites, who just looked in, in passing.

They stared hard at Jim, but I was too confused to introduce him, and he seized his hat, and hurriedly made his escape. I am sure they thought my manner very strange: incoherent, feverishly animated, and I am convinced that they believed that I was joking, when I assured them with peals of hysterical laughter, that my recent visitor was my husband, Sir Gervase Karslake.

The following evening, Mrs. Karslake and I saw him off in the "Wild Irishman" from Euston, and he accomplished my errand so well, that in three days' time I was back at the same terminus, awaiting the arrival of my cousin Mona. My happiness seemed all to come together. What bliss her visit would have been to me during that long dreary year—still it was bliss now—the pleasure of driving her about, and showing her the sights of London, of shopping, and purchasing pretty things for her and Posie, of displaying my own domestic treasures, and above all, of talking to her, were very great, indeed, during the first three days we talked ourselves quite hoarse.—Among other topics, needless to mention, that I introduced the subject of Mr. Jarvis. I heard a great deal of arrears of news from Billy Park. Uncle's affairs were much more flourishing, but my presents had been accepted, a piano for Posie, a pony and cart for Mona, for I had written Uncle quite a violent letter, and declared that if I might not have the pleasure of giving pleasure to my cousins, I would think him the meanest of men, after all I had accepted so cheerfully from him, and them. I was a greater favourite with uncle than ever, and, according to Mona,

I might write and say whatever I pleased. My father came home under Mr. Jarvis' escort—He was now very quiet, silent and depressed.

We took nice lodgings forhim, near me, as he flatly refused to stay in Green Street, and many a morning he, and I and Shawn, strolled about the Park in the wake of Mona and her lover. My father was known to the servants, as Mr. Le Marchant, a near relation of mine —but he was also known to the police in another character.

Jim had been absent for nearly five weeks, when he walked in one day quite unexpectedly, as Mona and I sat at breakfast. He looked worn and haggard as if he had been travelling all night, as it turned out was the case; he had come straight from the banks of the Vann, and had had a small success. Well! that was better than nothing! When we were by ourselves, he said: "Look here, Nellie. I could not say anything before Mona. It does not do to be *too* certain, but I think I have got *the* clue at last."

I was standing by the fire, nervously fiddling with a glass paper knife, and as I heard this welcome news, I let it fall from my hand, and it was shivered into atoms on the fender.

"Never mind that—look at *this* instead," drawing something out of his waistcoat pocket—something small, which was rolled up in half a sheet of note-paper. I gazed eagerly, as it was slowly unfolded, and displayed a gold sleeve link.

"*The* sleeve link!" I stammered out, in an awed whisper.

"Yes, the very one," now holding it towards me on the palm of his hand: "who would imagine, that on that little insignificant thing, that looks likes a brass button, a human life may depend; and that, small as it is, it is sufficiently important to be the principal factor in hanging a man."

"How did you get it—where did it come from?" I asked at last, but I did not attempt to touch it.

"From the very same cottage that produced the coat. Your friend, the old woman, only died last week, and her stocking, and her savings, were discovered in an old crock, half way up the chimney. She was a no-

torious miser, and knowing this to be gold, had not the heart to part with it."

"Will it be of any use—*real* use?" I asked expressively.

"Yes, I can swear to Kant's having the fellow of it; see, here are his initials plain enough, 'J. K.'

"It was a mere accident my seeing the other. One evening I was in his room, waiting for him. We were both dining out at the same place. I remarked that his dressing case was open, and said something about his show of jewellery, and he said:

"'I am so awfully late. Just get me out my solitaire stud, like a good fellow.'

"He was shaving, and we were greatly behind time, and I did as requested, and opened several places in vain. I was attracted by one pair of links—an odd pair—lying in a corner alone. The shape was unusual, lozenge shape, and they were of very soft Indian gold. I, prompted by some unaccountable impulse, held it up, and I now recall Kant's face, as I made some trivial remark. His whole appearance, as he stood razor in hand, looked as if he had seen a rattlesnake, or worse. He was livid, and told me very sharply, 'to put up that infernal rubbish," and I noticed, as I put it away, that he glanced at it furtively, as if it were some deadly thing. Knowing him to have odd and unaccountable moods, I said nothing, but proceeded to hunt out his opal solitaire. I might have saved myself the trouble, for he cut himself badly with the razor, and making that an excuse, sent me off to the dinner party alone, charged with his apologies and messages to say he was not well. I was convinced at the time that that pair of gold sleeve links had raised some gruesome vision of the past. Little did I guess, what a vision it was, or that mine was the then unconscious hand, that was welding the missing link in the chain that would draw him to—Justice."

"And will it?" I asked breathlessly.

"I cannot say. He is undoubtedly the murderer, though another has suffered for him. He must bear the penalty himself now. It seems too frightful, that a man who once wore the Queen's commission, a man in my

own regiment—that—in fact, it won't bear talking about."

"Well, it is a comfort, that by all accounts he has little or no English blood in his veins, and no relatives in this country," I said consolingly.

"I am going over to Paris by the midday express," continued Jim, "and taking two police officers with me. I fancy that before the month is much older, we shall return, escorting some one, like Eugene Aram—'with gyves upon his wrists.'"

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE WORTH OF A BUTTON.

"For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ."

—*Hamlet.*

In less than forty-eight hours, Jim had returned, and I knew by his face, as I met him on the stairs, that the battle was over, and the day was ours.

"Your father is cleared," were the first words he uttered.

"And the other?" I asked breathlessly; "what about him? what is to be his fate?"

(Now that the end was reached, and crime had been brought home, vile as he was, with the weakness, pity, and inconsistency of my sex, I wished him to escape the gallows—and even the clutches of the law.)

"You shall hear everything," leading me into the drawing-room, and closing the door. "He is before another tribunal now. Kant is dead," he continued very gravely.

"Tell me all, quickly," I said hysterically. "Don't keep me in suspense."

"Sit down there, Nellie, and you shall be told everything. There is nothing to tremble about now. I came over at once, so that you should not hear of it from any one but me, nor see it in the papers. We went across, with what Inspector Toogood called 'a beautiful case,' and saw Kant. He was much aged and

changed, greatly altered within one year. He thought I had come to call on him in passing through Paris, but I immediately disabused his mind of *that* idea.

"'No, I am on a totally different errand, to a friendly visit. My wife,' I said, 'once made a foolish attempt to bring a certain crime home to you—and she failed.'

"'She did!' he exclaimed, 'the pretty little fool, and burnt her fingers badly, thanks to her mad old father. It was all a hallucination on his part.'

"'But I am labouring under no hallucination,' I said, 'and I have come to talk to you about a certain gold sleeve link, that you lost one winter's day on the banks of the Vann.'

"'Talk away!' he snarled, 'you must be either mad or drunk. I never lost one there, or elsewhere.'

"'Oh yes,' I replied, 'you did, and its fellow has been found; the police are now examining your dressing case, and I am certain that they will be able to match *this*,' and I brought out his long lost link, and laid it on the table before him.

"'And what if it *does* match?' he enquired with an oath.

"'Simply that it proves, that you are the murderer of Mr. Sim. No stronger testimony is required. A man, who was then a boy, can swear to finding it where you shot Sim. The whole chain of evidence is complete. It has been tested, link by link, and has no weak point.'

"Kant's face was livid, large beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead, and at this moment Too-good came in, carrying the dressing case, and followed by .....'s valet. The link was found, and duly placed beside its fellow. No one spoke for fully two minutes, and I was almost afraid to look at the culprit, but I need not have been. The loud ticking of the gilt French clock was broken by his voice, saying in its usual rather grating tone:

"'*What* a fool I was to keep it: well, I knew it would come some day. Yes,' looking straight at me, 'I was a desperate man; chance played into my hands, chance and opportunity, *they* are to blame. I had no more intention of doing it when I set out that evening, no more than you had.'

"'Everything you say now, I warn you, will be used against you,' interrupted Toogood.

"'It is no matter.—There is a written confession in my desk. I have no relations; it will hurt no one; I will fetch it. You need not be afraid that I shall escape,' he sneered. 'There is no egress from the other room.'

"He went across, and closed the door after him, and in about five minutes came back with a thick envelope, which be handed to Toogood, and then once more resumed his seat, looking less concerned now than any of the party.

"'I daresay it will be a blow to the True Blues,' he remarked calmly, lighting a cigarette, 'though they never loved me! but after all, what are all soldiers, but licensed assassins? However, I never meant to be one in private. I was deeply in debt; for years I had been at my wits' end. Men have no right to put their pauper sons into crack cavalry regiments. My father was a Levantine merchant, and fond of boasting of his wealth, but he left *me* to live on my wits. I was at the end of mine, that cold, dark afternoon, when I met Sim in the lonely lane. He was cross, inclined to be cheeky too, and more than hinted that he wanted his money at *once*. I chaffed him and joked with him at first, and then we came to hot words. He declared if I did not instantly pay, he would post me up as a defaulter, and, stung to madness, I wrenched the gun from his hand, and shot him, point blank. He fell back without a cry, stone dead. It is *terribly* easy to kill a fellow. At first his death was an immense relief. I eagerly seized his pocket book, and felt safe; but after the hot passionate fear of the moment was over I had a cold revulsion of horror. However, self-preservation is the first law of nature, and to save my life was my natural impulse. I hid the body in some bushes, and ran home to mess. I had lost the link in the momentary struggle for the gun, and I always felt that if *it* were found, I was a dead man—my life would not be worth a *button!* Fortune favoured me. All the proofs, like bad cards, tumbled one after another, to Deane, and, I need not say, that I stood by and said *nothing*. I saw him transported, but I would not have seen him hanged in my place, no, bad as I am, I swear I

would have come forward ere that, and I have prospered, wicked as I seem! That tragedy was a turning point, as far as my money matters were concerned, and I have been ever since in smooth water.'

"'And did conscience never trouble you,' I inquired.

"'No, conscience and digestion are the same thing, and I am happy to say that I have been blessed with an excellent one. I have told all that is necessary. That poor half-witted Deane, will have his good name restored to him to-morrow. I am not sorry for him. No not a whit, for he married the only girl I ever loved, and her daughter is your wife, a Quixotic, beautiful, young fury, who dared to beard me in my own den, and suffered for it—she—'

"Here he stopped abruptly, and gasped for breath, and said in quite another tone, 'I have taken poison, took it just now, when I went for the letter. It is beginning—to work—'

"This was true. His mouth was contorted, his face had become corpse-like, his hands clenched, his body rigid; in spite of the utmost exertion of two doctors, he expired within twenty minutes.—He had evaded justice at the eleventh hour!"

And thus, after being under a cloud for twenty-two years, my father was cleared at last, and restored to his family and friends, with a spotless name and a blighted life. He came back to the world from which he had so long disappeared, like a second Rip Van Winkle, and found, alas! that he was forgotten, as a dead man out of mind. In these days of rapid existence, twenty-two years is a life-time. One or two elderly brother officers, came to see him, and invited him to dinner at their clubs, but I fancy these dinners were not a brilliant success. They could not well discuss "old times," with a man who had such a black chasm in his past. They could not talk shop, and new warrants, and new drill, with one who had been for twenty years drilled by prison warders. His hold on life was very frail, his constitution broken; he would not live long: this was the verdict given by a jury of three of the most eminent London doctors. "Take him abroad," they said, "to where he will have plenty of sun, and complete mental rest, and cheerful

bright surroundings." So we took him to Nice, where we remained for six months, and when we turned our faces homewards, we were alone. It is some small comfort to us to know, that the close of his life was happy. Jim and I have no secrets from one another now, and never will have, as far as *I* am concerned (save and except confidences connected with the love affairs of my young lady friends). We are held up as a model to all the married people in the neighbourhood, for Jim has left the service, and we live at Karslake. Our domestic felicity is a great deal too much for Mrs. Flint. She cuts *me* dead, yet still smiles sweetly on Jim—when she meets him by himself. Mrs. Shine, I regret to state, continues implacable; yea, although Mona is married to the husband of her choice, she still bewails her as "Poor Mona, who would have been Lady Karslake, only for that artful, wicked, ungrateful girl," (meaning me). Uncle has paid us a long visit, and will, I am sure, repeat the experiment. His avaricious old aunt has been gathered, at a ripe age, and his money affairs are comparatively prosperous. The house has been refurnished; Aunt Julia has been carried downstairs, and even out of doors, and enjoys better health than she has known for years. It is true, that she fainted, when her eyes first fell on the plundered avenue, but after all, the elms went in a good cause (for Brian), and she now passes daily up and down between the stumps, in her bath chair, without even flinching. Uncle keeps two clever cobs, and he and Posie occasionally go out to "look at the hounds"—though I would be very sorry to "look at them," from their point of view—and they no longer sigh and groan over useless hunt cards. The last time I was at Billy Park, I saw Miss O'Toole. She wore a bonnet with feathers, and a sealskin jacket, and drove over to call, on a hack car! She was in the highest spirits, having recently been left an annuity of two hundred a year, by some vague and distant O'Toole. "I don't know *who* it can be!" she frankly confessed to me, "for he is all mixed up in law business. Somehow I can't make head or tail of him." (Little did she suspect that she was speaking to *him*.)

"I am not a young woman—seventy-seven years of

age, and getting past walking miles to see my friends, I can't expect to enjoy the money long, and I am not very clear of the connection that left it, but God bless them —whoever they were, for thinking of a poor old creature. I'll keep a little machine and a pony of my own now, there's nothing like driving, and driving one's own cattle, for raising the heart in one!"

And indeed Miss O'Toole was gayer than many a girl of twenty—ten times gayer, than I had been at that age.

As for my mother-in-law, *she lives with us!* Can I, or need I, say more?

(For Miranda is married to the Dean (poor man!) and strikes terror into the hearts of the wives of the lesser clergy.) Mrs. Karslake is a far greater slave to Jim, minor, than ever I was, even when I was compelled to serve, Two Masters.

THE END.

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018